TO OUR READERS

We are pleased to announce that beginning with the January 1948 issue PARTISAN REVIEW will be published as a monthly. The current issue is the last in the bi-monthly series; the all-Proust issue scheduled for November will not appear because of the reorganization made necessary by the new plan of publication.

The publisher of the monthly PARTISAN REVIEW will be Mr. Allan D. Dowling, who will also serve as a member of an advisory board now being formed. The editorial policy and editorial staff of the magazine will remain unchanged. The increased frequency of publication and a larger operating budget will enable us, we hope, to draw upon the best writing in this country and abroad, as well as to widen the scope and distribution of the magazine.

In addition to fiction, poetry, political and literary criticism, the monthly PR will contain regular departments on music, art, movies, and the theater, as well as correspondence from cultural centers abroad. To an even greater extent than in the past, an effort will be made to give representation in the magazine to the literary and ideological tendencies of postwar Europe.

We are especially pleased to announce that beginning with January of next year, contributions will be paid for at the rate of 2½ cents a word for prose, and 50 cents a line for poetry.

The price of a single copy of the monthly PR will be 50 cents. A one-year subscription will be $5.00, a two-year subscription $8.00. (Canadian and foreign subscriptions will be $6.00 for one year, $10.00 for two years.)

Unexpired subscriptions will be filled on a pro-rated basis: that is to say, subscribers will receive as many issues of the new monthly as they would have received of the bi-monthly.

THE EDITORS

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Ernst Juenger: From Nihilism to Tradition

LOUIS CLAIR

ERNST JUENGER, an intellectual father of Nazism, is also the author of the best-known anti-Nazi book written inside Germany; an apostle of the warrior, he has also written an appeal for peace; once a follower of the anti-Christian Nietzsche, he has set himself up as the defender of basic Christian values. Such are some of the contradictions in this writer whose work has always had the power of provoking passionate debate but has nevertheless remained very little known in America and England—apart from a few references here and there, like Werner Bloch's, "From Under the Lid," (PARTISAN REVIEW, July-August 1942), and the recent remarks by Stephen Spender in his *European Witness*.

The reasons for this neglect must seem very strange to us when we reflect that Juenger has perhaps probed more deeply into the perplexities of modern civilization than any of his contemporaries among European writers. As we grow progressively aware of the decadence and nihilism that have overtaken European culture, so it becomes necessary that we pay attention to a writer who, having once been the prophet of nihilism, is now its rebel. The man who returns from the abyss has more to tell us than the spectator who has only walked its edge without ever descending.

I

Juenger's earlier work was formed by the experience of the First World War. Though classed among the nationalists because of his early war books—*Thunders of Steel* (1920), *The Battle as Inner Experience* (1922), *Fire and Blood* (1926)—Juenger never surrendered himself to chauvinism. These books hardly contain a patriotic line; Juenger's inspiration lies elsewhere—in the nature of mechanical warfare itself, the power of the huge supra-individual forces of modern war, the extreme situations of battle that transform the individual into something alien to himself.

The spirit of these books excludes compassion. War is an ele-

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mental process, it is *destiny* itself. Its cosmic experience generates a new race of heroes: men no longer individuals, indeed the very opposite of the modern individual, no longer dreading pain and death, functioning only as parts of the huge machine into which they have been sucked. Through their absorption into mechanical warfare, they transcend the atomized and devitalized individual of nineteenth-century liberalism. Juenger finds the slogans of the patriotic romantics meaningless and dangerous. Man, "thrown" into the existence of the warrior, is disclosed to himself in his extreme situation, where his being no longer stands in need of justification: war itself does not need to be justified, it *is*. In the last analysis, even the side on which one fights does not matter. There is little reason to prefer one or the other national camp; it is not the difference between nations which is "the center of the conflict, but the difference between two ages: the new age devours the declining one." To fight for the "museum culture" of the nineteenth century—the comfortable values of a bourgeois era—is to waste one's energy. The heroic warrior scorns vulgar satisfactions: his existence has become meaningful through the involvement in total combat.

The First World War, especially in its late mechanical phase, discloses the pattern of the future. The tank driver of the War becomes the tractor driver of the Postwar. The War has released the power of technology, and henceforth the symbol of our age is the cold streamlined grayness of steel. "To the individual the renunciation of individuality appears an impoverishment; it signifies death. But to the *type* it provides a key to another world, no longer subject to evaluation by the traditional yardsticks." 1914-1918 was the overture to the total mobilization of society; and in *The Adventurous Heart* (1929), *The Worker* (1932) and *Leaves and Stones* (1934), Juenger extends this experience of the War into the Postwar world.

The regulated functional man emerges as a new *type,* hard and ruthless, a cog in the technological process. The question whether he dominates the machine or the machine dominates him ceases to have meaning. Man and machine become one: through their integration a new beauty and a new order are achieved. The new world will be built when the organized Front of the War engulfs the whole rear of society:

> The picture of war as a military action gradually merges with the wider picture of a gigantic industrial operation. Beside the armies that meet on the battlefield arise the new armies engaged in communication, foodstuffs, armaments—the array of total industry. In the final phase there is not a single action, not even a woman sewing on her machine at home, which

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> does not have, indirectly at least, military significance. . . . The archetype of organization is military order and not the social contract.

Germany must break out of the Versailles encirclement; but this cannot be done by the conventional nationalist ideologies that are so much romantic ballast, but only by realizing the new style of life: identification of man with the machine. All ideologies—including the concept of progress and the idealization of the individual—must be abandoned as residues of a bourgeois culture now in its death throes. "For a long time we have been marching toward a zero point. Only those can march beyond it who have other, more invisible, sources of strength." We must arrive at "that high degree of abstraction which enables a modern artilleryman to look upon a cathedral as nothing more than a sight for his cannon."

> The bourgeois attempts to flee from a dangerous present into a utopian security. He continues to live in the past, but only as, during inflation, the old coins are exchanged without retaining their old value. The weakness behind slogans like "Law and Order," "Popular Community," "Pacifism," "Economic Peace," "Reconciliation"—in a word, behind these last appeals to the rationality of the nineteenth century—becomes obvious: these values belong to the vocabulary of the bourgeois restoration.

The postwar years are distasteful because they still contain a medley of values:

> They are characterized by a curious combination of barbarism and humanitarianism, like an archipelago where the island of the cannibals lies next that of the vegetarians. Extreme pacifism and tremendous increase in armaments, luxurious prisons and the hovels of the unemployed, abolition of the death sentence while at night the Whites and Reds cut each others' throats—all this has a fantastic quality and reflects a vicious world where the appearance of security has been maintained only in certain hotel lobbies.

This picture (should one call it utopia?) is frightening. The individual, creation of Christian and liberal ages, vanishes in the era now on the horizon. All values have been transvalued, and we begin to live now not in an anti-Christian but a post-Christian world. The bourgeois, handicapped by his addiction to the old values and ideologies, cannot cope with the machine. Only those in harmony with the tool, the *worker type,* can survive into the future. This new type can be observed in the millions of soldiers, all looking alike under their steel helmets, in the industrial worker, anonymous behind his goggles and protective shield, in the pedestrian directed by traffic lights. The machine, impressing its style on men, makes life mathematical and precise, and man himself but an element in the field of energy in which he moves. The climate of the new age also rejects the old value of free inquiry:

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> In a society dominated by the law of armament free investigation becomes impossible, because like a blind man it would open all the doors of a room without distinction, when in fact only the doors of power should be kept open. From that moment when it is ascertained what things must and what things must not be known, free inquiry becomes superfluous.

In place of "individual freedom" we shall have the glory of "service," which is but another name for domination, since "domination and service are one and the same thing." Morality becomes a luxury that is absorbed by technology.

Everything in this icy landscape must be adapted to the *things* of cold steel. The organic must fuse with the mechanical, the *thingification* of man be pushed to its extreme, and the world of the workers become functional and naked. Juenger is contemptuous of the romantic illusions of *blood-and-soil* ideologies, of racist phrases, and of a revolution that erects Brown Houses with the grotesque attributes of what was once a classical style. The only exciting beauty is bare steel, and any decoration, any departure from functionalism, must be repudiated. What smacks of comfort is a liberal bourgeois residue. The *worker type* stands naked and has no traffic with comfort. He is "a combination of high organizational capacity and complete color-blindness toward values, of faith without content and of discipline without justification."

II

A few years ago we might have rejected this prophecy as the product of a diseased mind, but by this time we have experienced Juenger's vision as historic fact—in Russia as well as Germany; and on the identification of these two we may also find his early words prophetic:

> Today the similarity between left and right becomes obvious and even the dream of freedom withers away in the iron grasp of necessity. This is a grandiose and horrid drama—these movements of ever more uniform masses caught in the mesh of the times. Forms of compulsion are at work here that are stronger than torture: they are so strong that men greet them with fervor. Behind each exit marked with the sign of happiness lurk pain and death. It is necessary to enter this arena well-armed.

In the totalitarian world that is still coming to be under our eyes, we witness this color-blindness toward values and this utter cynicism toward the whole Western tradition, as the armies of depersonalized robots descend like a plague of mechanical grasshoppers over the lands inhabited by *individuals*.

Juenger wrote these books in Germany during the years between two world wars. It is no coincidence that they appeared in the same period as Heidegger's philosophy. In the writings of both men

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are crystallized the experiences and the resentment of a lost generation that had witnessed the breakdown of values in war, revolution, inflation, and chronic unemployment—extreme situations in which established norms of thinking and behaving seemed futile and even harmful. During the War many young men had found, if not fulfillment, at least a mission that made sense; after their return they found a peace that seemed only a deceit and a fraud. They grew skeptical of the "eternal truths" that were still offered them. In the face of the desperate mediocrity of an order not worth living for, a nihilistic rejection seems the only possible answer: perhaps through its total negation a new meaning might be wrung from this world in shambles. *"We shall never understand why we are born into this life. All our so-called goals can only be pretexts. It matters only that we exist."* These words of Juenger might have been written by Heidegger.

But if *men* had failed each other, perhaps *material* would not fail, anonymous mass formations, precise mathematical laws, the secure hardness of steel, might afford protection to the individuals who had been stripped of their value. In this desolate landscape no lost illusions could be recaptured, but there would remain the hope of rejuvenation through the discovery of a new *authenticity* beneath the shattered surface of traditional values. The young men for whom Juenger was an intellectual father became revolutionaries without a program—"We must learn to march without banners"—blind men marching away from themselves toward anonymity and hardness. Out of this atmosphere of futility Juenger envisioned a world of *absurd* necessities, where man is lost in the fog of endless columns of gray helmets and black boots, rubbish heaps of dead bodies and rows of gray graves. The fog thickens, in the grayness nothing remains discernible, man is lost in nothingness. Amid the monotonous drumming of footsteps, rolling of tanks, and rumbling of wheels, where only the pounding of his heart reminds him of his own existence, man has but two alternatives: With Juenger, he can choose to lose himself in the fog and make his heartbeats one with the rumbling machines, and so face death fearlessly since his death has ceased to be his own; or, with Heidegger, man may listen to these heartbeats that reveal to him his own existence, which this foggy nothingness cannot deny, and which is redeemed from the all-embracing grayness by the somber blackness of a death that is his own.

Juenger has had the courage to explore his world to its limits, and it is senseless of us to withdraw in horror from his picture. If socialists found his view of war and the advent of the new de-in-

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dividualized type obscene (and it is obscene), we have since experienced this obscenity in reality and not only in books.

On the other hand, we cannot go to the lengths of Juenger's apologists, who claim that he simply drew a picture of the future without taking sides. For the fact is that Juenger has made clear his own participation: "We witness the peoples at work and we greet this work wherever it is being accomplished. . . . To have a part therein, that is the task we are waiting for."

And again:

> Practically the individual has to take part in rearmament—whether he sees in it preparation for devastation and fall, or perceives, on those hilltops where the crosses are storm-beaten and the palaces in ruins, that unrest which usually precedes the erection of new standards.

Nor is it any defense to point out that he never joined the Nazi party despite repeated overtures made to him. The Nazis with their blood-and-soil slogans, their primitive racist theory, seemed to him to belong still to the "liberal" era of ideologies. His allegiance was to the men who moved behind the façade of the movement and were preparing, before Hitler crushed them on July 30, 1934, the "second revolution" against the "conservative" Nazis.[1]

Juenger is too complex and many-sided a personality to be pigeon-holed among the definite Nazi types. The prophet of anti-individualism, he nevertheless maintained jealously his aloofness and preoccupation with the inner self. This double-sidedness often makes it very difficult to discover which, among the successive layers of meaning, is his real one. *The Adventurous Heart,* for example, which contains some of the most violent anti-individualistic passages, also contains sentences like this:

> It is impossible today to concern oneself with Germany in society; one has to do it in loneliness like a man who cuts paths through the jungle with his bushknife and keeps going only in the hope that somewhere else in the jungle another man is also at work.

The same Juenger who scoffs at romanticism and exalts the beauties of steel and modern technology can also write pieces on nature that are among the finest in modern German literature. His essay on language, *Praise of Vowels,* ranks high among all the essays on the German language. There is the Juenger who can record visions and dreams in a style reminiscent of Kafka: *"Three conditions can give the key to all experience: intoxication, sleep, and death";* the Juenger whose journeys through the Balearic Islands, France, and Dalmatia contain very beautiful descriptive passages; Juenger who studies with

1. Cf. Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism;* also, Erich Kahler, *Man the Measure,* particularly the pages that deal with Juenger and German nihilism.

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fascination the life of plants and beetles, who collects and contemplates stones and crystals; Juenger the aesthete, the amateur in German mysticism, connoisseur of French literature; etc. etc.

It is no wonder this man remained an outsider in the ranks of the extreme Right, which could count him among its own only with a feeling of uneasiness.

Yet when we have said all this, we have scarcely absolved Juenger of his share of responsibility: he was revered by the younger generation of Nazis, and his influence on the future leaders of the SS was certainly more powerful than that of the cloudy Rosenberg and the hysterical Goebbels. If he himself was not among the practitioners of violence, he nevertheless gave voice to the ideas under which this violence was prepared.

III

In 1934, one year after Hitler's rise to power, the poet George Friedrich Juenger, brother of Ernst and sympathetic to his thinking, published a poem, *The Poppy,* which was immediately understood as an attack on the regime. It circulated in Germany in thousands of handwritten copies. Ernst Juenger himself said little during these years. In *Leaves and Stones* (1934)—which otherwise develops the extreme consequences of the philosophy of the earlier books—hostile remarks about the regime seem to be found here and there: "The lesser race can be recognized by its attempt to depreciate others in comparison with itself. . . . It is the insignificant figures that come to the top with the finest movements of the world spirit." Otherwise, the books published in this period—*African Plays,* and a new, entirely rewritten edition of the *Adventurous Heart*—have little truck with political events, expressing mostly the private Juenger: early experiences in Africa, dreams, impressions. Repelled, apparently, by the Nazi movement, Juenger was still too close to attack it. He seems to have taken the Nazi revolution as another *destiny,* like war. Though he felt scorn for the mediocrities who had installed themselves upon the ruins of the Weimar Republic, he was still linked with them too closely to oppose them openly. So it was something of a sensation in Germany when, a few days after the outbreak of the war, Juenger's new book—a romantic novel, *On the Marble Cliffs*[2]—appeared, signifying an unmistakable break not only with the regime but, even more, with all that Juenger had stood for in the past.

High on the marble cliffs, a mythical landscape on the edge of

2. This novel will shortly appear in English under the New Directions imprint.

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a prosperous and peaceful valley, two friends, former army officers, have settled after a lost war. Below them, a quiet diligent people tills its fields in peace; farther on a rude yet hospitable, strongly traditional people of shepherds wrings a difficult living from the vast steppes that pasture their sheep. Still farther on is a dark impenetrable forest region, interspersed with marshes and swamps that have never been fully explored; a region ruled by a demoniac figure, the Chief Forester, who is engaged in a huge conspiracy to conquer the shepherds and peaceful peasants in the sunny world outside his domain. His agents, sly and crafty, succeed in penetrating everywhere:

> This showed the masterly manner in which the Chief Forester injected fear in small doses, which he gradually increased, finally achieving the paralysis of resistance. In this confusion he played the part of a supporter of law and order, but while his lesser agents fed the fires of anarchy in the guilds of the shepherds, the initiated managed to penetrate into the councils and courts, yes even into the convents, and were welcomed there as masterminds to deal with the mob. Thus the Chief Forester resembled an evil doctor who promotes the illness in order later to perform an operation he had in mind from the start.

The Chief Forester

> hated the plow, the wheat, the vine, domestic animals. . . . His heart was gladdened only when moss and ivy grew over ruined cities, and bats fluttered in the moonlight in the cracked vaults of the cathedrals. . . . He was cloaked in fear, and I am convinced that the secret of his strength was to be found in that far more than in himself. He was effective only when things began to tremble of their own accord.

The Chief Forester gradually conquers the peaceful population through cunning and terror; his rule wore "the mask of order."

Then follows the bloody and horrible campaign of the Chief Forester against the peaceful people of the country. His hordes conquer everything; they accomplish the "lowest and basest acts of which men are capable. . . . In order to inspire fear, they packed the corpses of the slain into barrels and boxes and sent them to their families." There is even a description of a concentration camp: "These are the cellars on whose foundations the proud castles of the tyrants are built . . . stinking holes of a most horrible kind, in which a rabble, eternally damned, finds horrible pleasure in the degradation of human dignity and freedom." At the end the old world collapses, the hordes from the swamps and forests are victorious, the flames of destruction engulf the monuments of culture and beauty. The two friends flee over the sea to the country that had been the enemy in the last war, and as the ship leaves port, they listen to a song from the shore:

Because no help from man can come,
God is the help we call upon.

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It is unnecessary to point out the political meaning of this novel. Only the fact that Juenger enjoyed the support of very high-placed army leaders explains how it could be published. Though withdrawn from sale for a time after a violent attack by the *Voelkischer Beobachter,* it quickly sold 30,000 copies. Many passages are unrelated to the political message, undoubtedly in part to lead the censor off the track, but also because Juenger wanted this book to be a work of art in its own right rather than a simple *roman à clé*. Written in the style of German romanticism that recalls Novalis, the book, though contrived in parts, abounds in passages of splendid beauty, and the whole effect is powerful both in intent and execution. Even apart from its historical message, it will probably find a secure place in German literature: the only enduring piece of anti-Nazi literature written inside Germany during the years of Hitler.

The Marble Cliffs represents a complete break with everything Juenger had stood for in the past. The nihilist has come into direct contact with the nihilism he himself has not been innocent of bringing into existence, and he now views its results with unmitigated loathing and horror. The Nazi regime is the negation of all values, but now this negation is repulsive to him. The values of peace, community, and natural order are those that make life worth living. Juenger turns to a completely new conception of the world: the nihilist becomes a conservative, desiring to preserve what can still be saved from chaos:

> Our most important activity was the study of language, because we recognized in the word that miraculous blade before whose rays the power of tyrants pales away. There is noble strength in the trinity of freedom, the word, and the spirit.

The man who had once advocated a new subservience and subordination to *material* writes: "I swore to live in loneliness with the free rather than celebrate triumphs with the slaves."

Juenger, of course, states that his work must be understood in its totality, and that there is a natural development rather than an abrupt switch in philosophy. Yet recalling the examples of other artists too, we may very well question whether the author himself is always the best judge of his own development. It is true that Juenger in his nihilist period was also obsessed by the idea of order: the old society was to be destroyed because it no longer embodied a valid order; dynamite was needed "to blast a free living space for a new hierarchy." But now, tradition is rediscovered as the guardian of order, and behind this tradition there is also the rediscovered order of nature: the friends in *The Marble Cliffs* study crystals, flowers,

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small animals to discover therein the pulsebeats of a naturally ordered universe. And where in the old conception order was completely secular, divine support must now be invoked.

Yet one significant point of continuity between the old and new periods remains. Juenger's book is still permeated by the old sense of the futility of man's action in a world ruled by destiny: "Of what avail are human understanding and human will when disaster has long been written in the stars?" Thus *The Marble Cliffs* is hardly a call to action. But though projected out of resignation and despair, it still has the will to express its author; and its publication must certainly be looked upon as an act of great moral courage.

The Marble Cliffs came out while Juenger was with the army, and for a long time no news was heard of him until, through the Swiss press, news of a new book, *Gardens and Streets,* arrived here. This title itself is significant: while the book about the First World War had been called *Thunders of Steel,* the diary of this Second World War is quietly entitled *Gardens and Streets*. The book deals chiefly with the campaign against France in 1939-40, and its tone is immediately set in one of the first notations: "Mobilization, I look at myself in my lieutenant's uniform—not without irony." Nothing is left of the early enthusiasm for war. War is still a *destiny,* a natural and cosmic phenomenon outside the sphere of human deliberation and purpose; but Juenger, detached and ironical, now experiences it from the outside. He "does his duty," and he still admires certain soldierly qualities, but what he is obsessed with now is his own inner being. "At certain crossroads of our youth Bellona and Athene might appear to us, the one with the promise to teach us the art to lead twenty regiments into battle, the other with the gift to combine twenty words into a perfect phrase. It could be that we might choose the second laurel, which is rarer and grows invisibly on the edge of the rocks." To which the indignant reviewer of the *Voelkischer Beobachter* replied dryly: "Twenty regiments still are of greater importance to us."

The book is written in that "slave language" that flourishes under all tyrannies: we often find it difficult to fathom the real intent below layers of allusion and unessential meaning. Yet the meaning is unmistakable when the man who once sang the beauties of the tank now writes: "Two tanks on the village square. I crawled into one and had to find again that, as usual, I feel uncomfortable in these things which smell of oil, gas and rubber."

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Juenger remarks upon his interest in certain species of insects:

> I have noticed the paradox of such occupations in the midst of catastrophe, yet I found this calming—it unveils a fund of stability, of civilizing resources. . . . One has to possess a salamander-like calmness in these times if one wants to attain one's ends.

He now attacks the "cold machine of power which pulls men into its wheels," and remarks: "Late but powerfully I began to realize the worth of continuity in life." The former nihilist now finds himself sorting ancient French documents with loving care that nothing be lost. The German nationalist has become a *conservateur* of the tradition of the enemy. The cycle has been accomplished.

IV

Our survey of Juenger's published writings would end here, but another work, still unpublished, deserves notice: *The Peace,* written in 1943 during the last phase of the Nazi terror, when Juenger was actively in contact with the conservative opposition that eventually made the ill-fated attempt on Hitler's life on June 20, 1944. *The Peace,* dedicated to his son, who, after "having suffered in the jails of tyranny fell on the field of honor," starts with a quotation from Spinoza's *Ethics*: "The hatred which is completely vanquished by love merges into love, and love then is stronger than it would have been if hatred had not preceded it." The book circulated in manuscript among the ranks of the conservative opposition to Hitler; but even now it cannot be published in Germany, since the Allied Military Government has put Juenger on the blacklist. He now lives on his farm near Hanover, unable to communicate through the printed word with the large circle of his readers. Yet, *The Peace* is among the very few serious discussions of Germany's problems today, and thousands of typed copies are being read in the Universities, in the circles of the Catholic and conservative youth organizations, as well as among socialists and pacifists—also among the remnants of the Hitler Youth.

The Peace, To the Youth of Europe, To the Youth of the World, has no organic connection with Juenger's early work, to which —except for a few pages of passionate denunciation at the beginning —it is stylistically inferior. Its content might have come from the pen of Karl Jaspers or Alfred Weber.

The first part, "The Seed," depicts the spasms and convulsions since the First World War and especially during the Hitler regime; a second part, "The Fruit," is an outline of a program to save Germany. Rejecting German nationalism, Juenger now advocates Euro-

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pean reconciliation and reconstruction: "It can be said that this war was the first general effort of humanity. The peace must be the second. . . . The peace must bear fruit for all." Casting the balance sheet of the Nazi regime and of his own earlier beliefs, Juenger views the results with horror:

> If we should ever again be seized by a new arrogant pride in the range and daring of our flight, in our spiritual wings, our wings of steel, it should suffice, as a cure, to turn our eyes on those men who were driven like cattle to the graves and crematory ovens where the executioner awaited them. Their rags were taken away from them and in their nakedness they were slaughtered like sheep that had been shorn. . . . We have seen the victims of this war. People of all nations have paid their tribute to this dark procession. They all took part in the sufferings; and therefore peace must bear fruit for all of them.

The peace must be a new constructive endeavor of all nations, especially the nations of Europe:

> This war must be won by all. This does not mean that there should not be victors and vanquished. A clear-cut decision, on the contrary, is to be welcomed; there should remain no corner that is not purified by fire. . . . The peace cannot be a peace of compromise. But also, it should not be a peace of force. The rules that governed the war must not govern the peace. It would then be but a spurious peace, an overture to a new civil war and to the constitution of new alliances and blocs.

The only way out is a United States of Europe. Technical and economic problems must be regulated in common between the peoples of Europe, but particular and differentiated cultures should continue: the separate peoples of Europe, possessing different languages, laws, and mores, and differing in their religion and art, must continue to exist because "there can never be enough colors on this palette." The premise of this European reconstruction is a revival of Western humanism. But the humanist tradition is not enough, and the new order needs to be anchored on a reinvigorated Christian Church. The peace demands this new springtide of humanistic and Christian values. Juenger, at last, allots some importance to the individual:

> The fury of the elements makes the individual lose belief in his own strength; he throws up his hands before the tremendous conflagration. Through renunciation of the will he becomes architect of his own powerlessness, and so is enslaved by fear and by those strong demons whose force is rooted in the counterplay of hatred and terror. . . . Those powers want to make man their servant, but they expect a kind of joyful applause from those who give up responsibility. . . . Against them we must affirm that the responsibility of the individual is immense, and that nobody can take this load from him. The whole world must appear before each individual's conscience, and the person sit as judge over what is just and unjust. . . . Today more than ever, the individual has the chance to do good.

Extended comment is perhaps unnecessary: Juenger has returned to all the values he once despised: individualism, *humanitas,* peace,

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supranationalism, religion. But if in these last three books, Juenger makes a desperate effort to re-establish contact with the tradition of the West, in the process he has also become trite and banal. The values that he rediscovers and advocates with the enthusiasm of the neophyte have become emptied of substance. Their heritage can no longer be appropriated by simple absorption but only by a process of creative transvaluation. But this transvaluation would demand a final break with one tendency present in Juenger throughout: his belief in the ultimate powerlessness of man to shape his own destiny. The submission to the iron laws of technological necessity has been replaced—despite the moving but vaguely moralizing appeal to the creative resources of the individual—by a submission to religion: *Because no help from man can come, God is the help we call upon.*

NOTE: There is very little literature on Juenger accessible in English. An excellent interpretation of the early Juenger can be found in Erich Kahler's historical study, *Man the Measure* (New York, 1943). The only useful work written outside Germany is *Ernst Juenger, Die Wandlung eines Deutschen Dichters und Patrioten,* by Karl O. Paetel (New York, 1946), which, unfortunately, has not yet been translated. Though I disagree with some of Mr. Paetel's conclusions, I have found the book a mine of valuable information and informed appreciation.

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Ph. D.

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THE GIRL opposite Auerbach put her book down and stretched her arms easily. Her open coat slipped off her shoulders and Auerbach looked closely at her white blouse, watching the way her breasts arched before the pull of her muscles. He knew that by stretching out his foot he could nudge the tip of her shoe and she would look up at him. But where was the girl with whom he could carry it through? Last year there had been the little blond student, arguing concepts with him after class, meeting him each day in the library so that he might point out books to her. So easy it could have been, with her tight, pert little body.

She rose, the girl opposite him, and Auerbach watched her down the long aisle. Holding his eyes near the tautness of her skirt, he, Auerbach, knew he must find it again, the warm center that lay within history. He bent down to the book, reading quickly, translating easily. Epic sweep almost entered the words, and the stillness of the room enthralled him as he sought it, almost as a Talmudist, the X quantity of revolution. He knew that one could run naked in historiography, lashed by the intricacies of each turn and problem. It would not be long now before he could live in his period, know that within his hands he held something more than a tool.

To be like Crane, the trick of objectivity combined with the warmth and passion that came from your own personality. Turning fact into myth and myth into fact, and then destroying both, that was the trick. Sometimes in class he might rouse some interest for the first week, or even the second week. The students would do their reading, the discussions might pierce the fatty tissue toward the center, but then, slowly and almost artfully the thing would die out, and he would be left cold by the sound of his own voice.

Auerbach leaned back against the chair, and made his knees a fulcrum upon which to rest the book. The words lost their unity, rubbed and irritated his mind. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps there was a method in setting up the *cahiers* in volumes of a foot and a

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half. How many of them did he need to go through? Carefully he had kept down the number of volumes to the barest minimum, but even as it was, he would have to read an amount equal to at least four times his height, probably much more. He reshuffled the white index cards, studied them again to see if he might pick up the lost thread. It was as though something were missing from the stack, written down on the cards in careful script, and yet as he counted them again he saw that the amount was exact. Rubbing his forehead, Auerbach wondered if he had found the best way of attacking the problem. A touch of his old sinus trouble spread across his eyeballs.

Today for the second time in the week the ache and the dullness came into him, entered where his thighs joined his stomach and crept up into his body. He knew he could leave the reading room, go into the lounge and smoke for a few minutes. It had helped him before, a cigarette, yet now the thing within him loaded his center, kept him in the chair. He looked up toward the large window, tried to push himself back to the *cahiers,* but his eyes remained on the fine dust that swam in with the sun. It settled on the drab portrait on the wall in front. Particle by particle it dashed itself against the frame and fell from visibility.

There was nothing beyond this for him. He had checked and rechecked his sources, continued his notes and cross-references. The problem had been simple and fitted well into the rationality of everything he had been taught. The structures crumble, slowly at first, almost a physical law, when the pressure from without is unequal to the pressure within. Auerbach sought now, even as he had written it in the outline, the forces of historical weathering, the voices that bit by bit eroded into the mass, carried it away and redeposited it in some new form. Here was one, as he turned the page, the peasant who finds himself unable to buy salt, more plaintive than the rest, begging to know wherein he had sinned. Where was the fear and where was the sin? After all, what was it, revolution. All right, it was an abstraction, it begins and it doesn't begin, it ends with a beginning. It was for him, Auerbach, to rest his hand lightly in the balance, for as his stomach twisted his breath in for a moment, he remembered what Crane had said in a seminar to him.

"Avoid it," he said, "avoid at all cost any descent in the mud. It becomes the end of all history."

It was as though he were standing, watching an old film being run off. Sitting in darkness he probed the shapes till they grew dimmer, and then somewhere from the unknown center of the screen

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a hand would be held out to him. As he grasped it, the center would retreat and he would remain tied off by the darkness, watching the figures move more clearly now in their absurd posturings.

He remembered now, Auerbach, the time he had once been in a subway and the train had emerged from the tunnel. He had been seated near a window, resting his elbow on the ledge, leaning and peering out at the darkness. The train had passed a large expanse of vacant lots, and suddenly it was as if the concept of time and movement had been lost. Auerbach saw a bonfire in one of the lots. Splotched shapes that seemed to be children hovered near it, and he saw one of them standing detached from the others holding his hands out to catch the warmth. And suddenly he saw the boy's shoulders grabbed, propelled from behind into the center of the fire. Then time entered him again and as the train passed he tried to raise himself from the seat. The thought had come that he must run back through the aisles to catch the last sight. It was the moment that he must catch and hold, where the child was not frozen in blocked terror and the dim sense of his own fear was no longer menacing. Each day in the subway, for months afterwards, Auerbach sought the conclusion, sometimes in the tunnel lights which flashed past him as the train rose on the elevated above the city streets.

It was as though here too time must stop. He rolled his pencil, watching it skid along the table. He, Auerbach, knew now how the story ended. It was not lost high over the streets of the city, for him it did not die, but was perpetually preserved. From the beginning he could trace it, the shape and the touch of it.

After all, what did it amount to? Somehow it must be ended, his thesis, and he was competent enough to handle it, play around with it, shape in the footnotes. The solid feel of it in his hands, and then the slow, modulated pitch of his voice before the examining board. "And Mr. Auerbach," the name to be twanged out by a gentile voice, his eyes to meet sharp noses and thin faces, "what would you say is the major concept your research thesis has given you?"

"Gentlemen," he should answer, words framed like blank verse, "history since the great year of 1789 has been a long, a steady and ofttimes a hard march to the great goal of human freedom." And as he thought now of the moment when he would open his mail to hold the culmination of all his years, Auerbach remembered his own beginning.

Auerbach remembered it now, the first book of history he had owned as a boy. His mother had given him money for it, after he had

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warmed her pride with his bar-mitzvah speech. She had given it to him silently, without need or desire for thanks, and he remembered now that it was with a sense of inevitability he had accepted it, for he had known it would be a book, one book or another book for the rest of his life. Gentlemen of the examining board, I have learned that the Jew chokes his fear only by the sheer quantity of books he has read.

He, Auerbach, placed the book down on the table, stood up and stacked it beside the other volumes. Gathering them up in both hands he walked to the main desk past the long tables and the dim-orange lamps that seemed strangely perverted against the rays of the sun. Softly he walked, so that he might not be perceived, he, Auerbach. that they might not look up from their books and wet their lips and shake their heads in annoyance Quietly, easily so that he might be taken for one of them. He placed the books down on the main desk, stuck the envelope of index cards and cross-references under his arm and walked out, down the stairs and past the stone lions into the street.

He crossed the wide avenue outside the library, gripping the envelope tighter, feeling the thickness of the notes within. At home he could sit in the warmth of his living-room, surrounded by the books, go to his files and recheck today's work with all that he had done up to now. Every day he had done this, and somewhere he had lost something. It was in his mind as capitalized, clear and bold. In sweeping print the scholars could set it down, oh THE GREAT FRENCH REVOLUTION. The *cahiers*. The man with the empty salt-bags. He had known them before. From dust they come marching, the peasants. This is the beginning. Marching down a road, and through the battle cries clear voices come. He paused for a moment, wondering which grocery to stop off at. He decided as he turned the corner past the El to go to the big chain store where he was unknown and he would have no need to speak. Better to carry it through alone, to take the food and to cook it alone, for the pains in his stomach and over his temples had disappeared. He had been afraid of the streets, but now as he passed the freight entrance of a large office building he could look at the long line that waited for the freight elevators without the sense of guilt that had scarcely left him since he had been seventeen, when he had taken a summer job as an errand-boy. What was to be done now was to restore himself, to drive out the taste of the library with some scrambled eggs and toast, some coffee and a good slice of fruit cake.

It was clearer every moment as he stood before the cash register,

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pushing the parcels nearer and nearer to the clerk. He paid and walked briskly now through the store into the street. It was beginning to rain, a perspired little summer rain. He hardly felt it as he dashed across the street into his house. Up through the elevator now and all would be solved. Peasants marching and singing the Marseillaise, all that he had learned would be true. His chair, and the warmth inside him would clear his mind. He would be Auerbach again, the historian, one of the many, the tireless workers who put down a few lines in the story of the beginning of Western civilization.

That was it, he told himself, as he banged the door of the elevator shut. He pressed the button of his floor. The greatness and the power of the beginning. Peasants struggling and dying, throwing down to us, here, today, the brightness, the thread, the torch of human freedom. He would chase it off, or better still banish it into a footnote, the image of the man with the salt-bags. Historians should be older, more stable. He pushed the elevator door open and fumbled for the key, putting the groceries down in the hallway. He let himself in and stacked the food on the kitchen table carefully, then undressed. Slipping into a smoking jacket he felt the pockets and took out a cigarette. He lit it and sat down in the big chair, the one nearest his large bookcase. He inhaled and cupped his lips to let the smoke out slowly. Over a year he had spent in seminar work, studying them carefully, Marx and Spengler. From one pole to another, austere and gloomy as they struggled in their own darkness, still they had shown to him that the man with the empty salt-bags had not been left in shadows, as the memory of the vacant lot. He, Auerbach, had to lose this, the fantasy of projection.

After all, what was it? Crane had given him the best explanation of it once in his office, words chosen steadily, slowly. "It's merely, Auerbach, a stage that comes to every historian, especially a young one. You reach a certain point in knowledge where you're able to almost live in the period, it's at your fingertips. Almost able to enter it. But something more is required. That's the moment that you must push on, where the going is smooth on the surface, but it gives beneath your feet." He had reminded Auerbach of what Tawney had written once.

He put the coffee up to boil, cut a slice of the fruit cake and took it back to the chair. Wisely he had shaped them, Crane, repeated the words of Tawney with a hushed voice. The certainty of one age is the problem of another. Auerbach stuffed his mouth with the fruit cake, picking it from the plate with his fingers. The certainty of one

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age is the problem of another. It was good to be a midwestern liberal like Crane. Better it was, much better than to have gone to C.C.N.Y., to graduate into the I.R.T. He laughed, for he was Auerbach, marginal man of the initial. He rose and poured himself a cup of coffee. Balancing it next to the cake plate on the arm of the chair, he decided it was time to begin. The period of integration was at hand, and he removed all his folders from the file.

It was fully an hour before the slow ache diffused through his eyes again. The film unwound, it turned back upon itself. In letters, mighty capitalized letters, it was spelled out for him—THE GREAT FRENCH REVOLUTION. Again it played into him like a dream as he moved the index cards, examined the typewritten sheets, and then the sense of time distorted rushed in again to his temples.

He ran through his index cards again, this time with his thumb, just to touch the sheer weight. He threw them down on the rug. They spread out evenly, and he rose, stepped over them and went into his bedroom.

And tomorrow he, Auerbach, must face a class and he must face Crane, stand before the great bulk of the man, he, Auerbach, little Jew of C.C.N.Y. To tell his classes and to tell Crane. The thesis to be HISTORY AND THE ALPHABET OF AGONY. It became smoother to him as he eased himself into bed. He would have to begin again, perhaps in the train, walk back alone, in darkness along the track, but now he could go no further. He pulled his knees toward his chest, head bowed to meet them as he hovered toward the center of sleep.

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Notes on the American Intelligentsia

J. F. WOLPERT

THOUGH THE ROLE and function of the intellectuals in the modern world has been much discussed of late, there has been surprisingly little analysis of the distinctiveness of this social group as it operates within the American culture. What studies we have are characterized by an impressionism not very useful for systematic analysis. The lack of such material is in itself sociologically significant, showing that the American intelligentsia has moved on the periphery rather than within the mainstream of our social life.

The category "intellectuals" has been amorphous and ill-defined. It has been taken to include, or exclude, a host of groups as befits the particular bias of the writer dealing with the problem. It is therefore incumbent upon us to formulate our definition as explicitly as possible. We may begin the characterization of this group—taken as a whole— by saying that its main concern is with the production and dissemination of ideas in their broadest connotations. Ideas we may define both as the stored body of knowledge from the past of which our colleges and universities are the official transmitters and the contributions of the humanities as well as the social and natural sciences not as yet sanctioned by tradition. The latter of course have their main source outside the academy. Further, it is important, when using our definition of ideas, to distinguish them from folk beliefs and the uncritically accepted assumptions and stereotypes of nonintellectual social strata.

What characterizes the intellectuals, then, is their need for a critical attitude lifting the type of knowledge they are concerned with to the level of ideas. This is an attitude shared by all divisions of intellectuals. Also, their concentration upon ideas, even those of the strident sort lately propounded by the Nazi intellectual apologists, tends toward universality. If the times are propitious for their acceptance, neither national frontiers nor ethnic background can prevent their finding wider and wider audiences.

The great German sociologist, Max Weber, distinguished in his

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study of political structures between two types of politicians, those who lived for politics and those who lived off politics. The former have an emotional investment in particular ideologies which converts their job into a devotion to a calling, whereas the latter are in politics merely as a way of making a living. We may use this dichotomy broadly in subdividing types of intellectuals in America. Those who conceive of their role as a devotion to a calling live for ideas, even though they do live off their intellectual production in a psychological sense. This group formally includes members of the faculties of the universities and the few writers in the large cities who do independent critical work pitched beyond the level of commercialism. These find their outlet in the little magazines. In the latter group—those who live off ideas—would be included the journalists of the large city dailies and the writers for the organs of public opinion on a mass scale such as the Luce publications.

There is another distinct group which fits into neither of these categories, whom we shall call the ideologists. They are, in America, the acolytes of Stalinism such as the contributors to the *New Masses,* also the writers on the staff of *PM* and the facile popularizers who dessеminate the orthodox views of the party, sugar-pilled for mass consumption. The ideologists' attitude toward ideas is ruthlessly pragmatic. Their touchstone for the evaluation of an idea is whether or not it contributes to the realization of the party program. Thus every idea is judged in terms of its political manipulability. The ideologists also carry with them numerous dupes, intellectuals who because they want to be considered revolutionary or "progressive"—the word debased to party usage nowadays—support the Stalinist position with trivial reservations. In doing so they serve the useful function of making Stalinist propaganda respectable. This group has been aptly named the "totalitarian liberals" by such trenchant analysts of their social role as Sidney Hook.

In the historical tradition of Western culture the academic intellectuals are the direct descendants of the clerks who formed, in the medieval period, the nucleus of what was to become the modern university. Even in America this heritage, however much dissipated by the norms and practices of capitalist democracy, can be discerned in the academic attitude. In a secularized social frame this manifests itself in a cloistered disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The secularized function of salvation is served by the contribution, however small, of a scrap of knowledge to the particular

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discipline. This procedure is institutionalized via the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in the graduate schools.

In America, however, the position of the university man is most ambiguous and the ideal set forth has been twisted out of easy recognition by the pressures of the American social structure. These pressures erode the formal devotion to a calling, turning, in the large universities, the monastic cell into a place more nearly resembling the assembly line. The bureaucratic structure of the university with its divorce of administration and scholarship, commented upon by Veblen, results in the dependence of the scholar upon the administration. Finally the authority vested in the boards of trustees gives them the power to withhold economic rewards in case of deviation from accepted norms. These trustees come from the most conservative segment of American society. They are businessmen of repute or their satraps in the state universities, the politicians who live off politics.

The psychological effects of this situation on the personality of the academic man is that of imposing unconscious, if not conscious, limits upon his categories of inquiry. There is a gradual shading in analysis from the patently innocuous to that which might call into question the basis of the existing order. The academic hierarchy, from instructor up to full professor, enforces caution on the imaginative or adventurous thinker. The graduate schools serve as training grounds for the inculcation of proper occupational norms. Here the aspiring scholar learns to conform to prescribed ways of doing his work. If there is no check upon inquiry because of its possible social effects, there is one set up by academic mediocrity itself which spurns a subject of signal interest or one marked by too much originality. Along with this goes the strange belief that finished writing is incompatible with thorough analysis.

Another form of academic self-regulation is the Ph.D. routine, which contributes to the frustration of the aspirant in embarking on an independent course of study. In order to hold a job he must get his Ph.D. union card or risk a precarious existence. By looking askance at any work which does not fit into the pattern the academic societies aid in disciplining recalcitrant academics. The organs of expression of these societies print material which concerns itself, for the most part, with some pulverized particle of knowledge without relevance to general problems. A perusal of such magazines as the *American Historical Review, American Sociological Review, American Economic Review,* or the *Modern Language Quarterly* will convince one

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of this fact. And since the audience for the material is strictly within the prescribed field, the result is intellectual incest.

The academic conventions reveal the plight of the scholars. These annual gatherings have a threefold function. Ostensibly, but of least importance for most, unfortunately, they provide an opportunity for the reading of papers and personal discussion of intellectual problems which the wide dispersion of academic centers does not ordinarily afford. The other two functions of the convention are derived from the over-all social structure. Established academicians from the various colleges converge upon the designated spot to investigate the chances of better jobs, and neophytes in search of careers sound out department heads for any possible openings. The departmental heads themselves are often there for the sole purpose of discovering a man to fill a vacant position. This aspect of the convention takes on the character of the market-place where the fine American art of the manipulation of personality comes to the fore. Here is a version of the businessman's club, in which the mores of American culture operate in a more subdued way. The other important function served by the convention is the chance it provides for the big shot in the field to bask in the limelight, to command deference from the lesser brethren and expand under the warmth of prestige made manifest. For the lesser fry there is the opportunity to exchange a few words with the great ones. Status relationships are brought sharply into focus by these gatherings so that after the initial forced cameraderie the great ones retire among themselves, and discussion is limited down the line by hierarchical criteria, reaching bottom with the proletariat of graduate students who, genially ignored, cringe self-consciously in the corners and corridors of the meeting place.

It must not be thought that there is perfect uniformity in the general personality-structure of the academic man. The variations in attitude, aside from individual idiosyncrasy, are the products of the different fields of interest. The economist, for instance, is, as a type, inclined to act as a man of affairs. Since orthodox classical economics still prevails, he displays many of the characteristics of the big businessman. He is in the way of being the businessman's ideologist, systematizing and refurbishing the economic beliefs of these American barons, making objective and highly abstract, in terms of the monetary calculus, the subjective valuations of the men of hard-headed action. In this respect the economist differs considerably from the philosophy teacher, who usually is inclined to underestimate the weight of social and economic conditions that bear down on him.

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There is an accepted pattern for the academic man not only in his intellectual but also in his personal life. In the latter, too, he cannot afford to be conspicuously out of line. The university or college operates within a community ranging from the large city to the country town. Though the city may allow more opportunity for the violation of bourgeois modes, the necessity of meeting a routine of scheduled classes and the pressure from the students and the administration forces him to dress soberly, speak circumspectly and be wary of activities of an ungenteel nature. He therefore finds himself gradually moving into a pattern not of his own making. The conflict engendered by the contradiction between his style of life and his critical attitude toward the prevailing norms may often, in the case of the sensitive individual, take a heavy psychological toll. As a result he either overcompensates by consciously immersing himself in parochial attitudes shared by the folk, or finds that in any action prompted by his critical attitude he is checked by awareness of the ambiguity of his own motives. Often he finds an outlet by contributing to the little magazines where academicism is held in scorn. There he indulges in the masochistic pleasure of whipping the sore spots of the academic body social.

This is not to be taken to mean that all academicians fit into the pattern we have described. It is the general outline we have in mind, not particular cases. There are a minority of scholars who, aware of their situation, refuse to accept it and strive to fulfill their role both as transmitters of culture and contributors to knowledge by conscientious adherence to the critical attitude. They maintain their devotion to their calling, though in the process they must suffer for it in terms of diminished rewards and diminished prestige. They are able to leaven the loaf of academic stereotype and to render the continuance of American higher learning not completely futile. Their position, however, is that of marginal men.

The position, function, and role of the group of intellectuals commonly designated as bohemians differs considerably from that of the academy. By bohemians we mean those intellectuals who form the avant-garde in the creation and dissemination of ideas. They are, for the most part, free-lance workers open to the most flexible kind of intellectual exchange. However, their audience is a self-styled elite, very small in number; and the little magazines are the vehicle through which their ideas are made manifest. The minimal size of the audience has as its psychological concomitant the heightening of

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self-importance, thus compensating to some degree for the group's greater alienation from society as a whole. With respect to the subject matter of these magazines, there is an overlapping with that which the academic minority, mentioned previously, is concerned with —the minority which considers formal academic outlets too narrow, not allowing for that free flow of ideas and the awareness of new intellectual currents which, in the official journals, too often harden into the patterns of sterile, ritualistic epigonism.

The term bohemian should not be considered a derogatory one. Both as a set of intellectual attitudes and as a way of life bohemianism has its roots in the social trends of Western culture since the French Revolution. The breakdown of the patron system has strongly influenced the status and role of the artist-intellectual, who can no longer count, as in the past, on a definite audience, and is therefore insecure both economically and psychologically. In America, of course, the absence of this cultural break—for the patronage system never existed here—has produced a hybrid kind of bohemianism.

Bohemia includes commentators on the arts as well as critics of literature and social critics who write from a broader humanistic standpoint. Formally speaking, the critics remind one of the medieval theologians who concentrated upon highly sophisticated ratiocination of the ineffable religious core in contrast to the mystics who were in communication with the Godhead through direct nonrational means. This distinction, elaborated upon by Rudolf Otto in his *Idea of the Holy,* carries through to the world of art where the artist not given to verbal expression plays a part parallel to that of the medieval mystic. But of course some, like T. S. Eliot, act out both roles.

The avant-garde bohemian intellectual lives in a state of estrangement from the population at large. Deprived of recognition in the social scheme, this type of intellectual, to assure his survival, has tended to drift into defined areas of a few large cities, or has formed communities of his own on the fringes of such cities as New York and San Francisco. Marginal men, the bohemians are paradoxically enough an elite proletariat in the original sense of the word. Outside the minuscule world of their shared values and manner of life they are regarded either with benign philistine amusement or as a threat to faith and morals.

Those of the avant-garde not fortunate enough to possess private means lead a truncated existence. To survive they must at some point compromise by taking a job for some months in the despised commercialized pursuits, but as soon as they accumulate some small

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savings they abruptly quit to concentrate furiously upon what they consider to be truly creative work. However, the bohemians who "make good" in the accepted monetary sense are faced with a psychological crisis. For if, symbolically speaking, they move from the coldwater flat to the elevator apartment, they are risking surrender to the world they condemn and divorce from the creative source which has given their work substance. Rapid withering of talent, as shown in slick formula novels or plays or "think-pieces" for periodicals, has more often than not been the fate of the intellectual who started out on the periphery and steadily moved toward the center of social power. The career of Clifford Odets illustrates this process. There is constant pressure on the avant-gardist who has won recognition to apply his talents to the construction of easy affirmations and plausible rationalizations of the cultural status quo. The evolution of Van Wyck Brooks is a pertinent example. For a study of the more politically motivated type of backsliding avant-gardist we may refer the reader to Mary McCarthy's probing analysis in "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man."

The sense of in-groupness of the bohemian intellectual provides a source of psychological security against the isolation which is the fate of the alienated from the larger social structure. The vice of this group cohesion is the stereotyping of what is considered avant-garde without reference to explicitly formulated criteria. The criteria tend to become not a rationally composed set of standards guiding individual expression but rather a merely negative response to the rejected environment. Thus we have the emergence of modish cults and the overestimation of mediocre talents. Psychological dependence being pervasive in this group, there is the inclination to avoid trenchant criticism for fear of forcing the offended member to break away from the group. These factors make for a weakening of discrimination. As a result, we see that a Henry Miller and a Kenneth Patchen receive the adulation more becoming to seers and prophets than to writers of as yet undetermined stature. The warping of judgment to which the bohemian intellectual is subject is due to the distorted role he is compelled to play in a culture which has no defined place for him. Publicists like Dwight Macdonald retreat into a world of fantasy where it becomes easy to ignore the brutal onset of modern power-combinations. This self-created world of infantile regression prohibits an incisive cultural and political criticism informed by a grasp of social realities.

In the early part of the century the French sociologist Durkheim

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pointed out that as a result of industrialism and the abstract social relations which it brought there is a growing tendency for the individual to suffer from an unrelatedness to the group. He called this condition *anomie*. The intellectuals as a whole are subject to this condition more than other members of society, and among the intellectuals it is the bohemians who are more likely to find themselves without a bulwark of values and hence forced to plot their way through a spiritual wilderness. It is they who most strongly exhibit the characteristics of *anomie*.

The bohemians are, generally speaking, recruited from two social areas. There are those who grew up in metropolitan centers and are for the most part members of minority groups. Because of this background they are able to see more clearly the faults of the existing system, having directly experienced its contradictions. They usually come from proletarian or lower middle class homes and go through a stage of intense political activity in high school or college. If they reject the Stalinist ideologists, to whom they are initially drawn, it is often because of an esthetic sensitivity which brings home to them the true meaning of Communism. Manipulation of ideas and of the processes of art for party ends hampers the free flow of intellectual creativity to which the bohemian is committed.

The other major source of bohemian recruitment is from the small towns in the American heartland where native talent, be it genuine or illusory, is stifled by provincialism. Both lower and upper middle class recruits come to bohemia from these towns. In their own class the bourgeois bohemians are a tiny minority. It is a class in which conspicuous leisure and consumption make possible the patronizing of art and the intellect. Social security and established position allow this cursory interest, whereas in the lower strata of the middle class, especially in the smaller cities and towns, ideas and art are suspect because insecurity, both social and economic, enforces rigid conformity to conventional values. In these strata intellectualism immediately takes on revolutionary implications, adding to the already existing anxiety brought on by a problematic status in society.

The upper middle class deviants are given the opportunity for cultivation in their own milieu, but because of the acute realization that in this milieu intellectual and artistic endeavor is at bottom considered to be nonessential and ornamental they are led to cut their social ties and to drift into the centers of bohemia. This divorce from their background, if accompanied by contradictions in their personal

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life, often breeds neurosis out of which may come significant work, or, as is more general, a pitiful stretching and straining of small gifts. As an example of the former type there is the life and art of Hart Crane, whose anguished existence had the implications of an American tragedy Dreiser never conceived.

The bohemians are the vanguard of the ever-moving cultural frontier. They are the first to feel out the emergent line of sensibility and consciousness; and though often taken in by the spurious or the merely bizarre they nevertheless fulfill the important function of bringing to light new attitudes and interests which portend social and political change.

While the academy is to some extent still in possession of certain standards of criticism drawn from tradition and acquaintance with scientific procedures, the bohemians are in the very nature of their social role deprived of intellectual stability. The defect of their virtue is to be receptive to charlatanism which has the aura of creative originality; all too often they admire the grotesque and the startling regardless of its meaning and content. Thus in the little magazines one finds genuinely valid material together with a mass of undigestible jargon. This stuff is often concocted by people who live on the fringes of the avant-garde and who assimilate the mannerisms of this group for reasons other than a concern with ideas or values—reasons that they themselves are not aware of. They are the parasites of intellectualism, who believe themselves to be possessed of originality and critical acumen merely because they consider themselves to be "different"; their work is no more than a product of their social and psychological maladjustment—a maladjustment not strained through any objectifying process. An inverted snobbishness compensates for their alienation from philistine norms, and their bohemian existence protects them from social pulverization. Actually they are brothers under the skin of their philistine counterparts.

To be distinguished from them are those bohemians whose neurotic patterns are intertwined with the critically and creatively viable. Yet even such people, delimited as they are in role and function by a frustrating social structure, show traces of the deadly blight. To realize fully their potentialities will be impossible for them under conditions of the existing social order. For the present, however, the bohemian intellectuals must continue to live and work as a minority group, subject to the deprivations which are the lot of minorities everywhere.

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The distance from the cold-water flats of Greenwich Village to the whited sepulchre of the Time and Life Building off Fifth Avenue is longer than can be gauged from the short subway ride. This does not mean that it cannot be traversed, for the careers of aspiring free-lance intellectuals standing outside the social order all too often testify that it can. Not a few of the intellectuals who begin their careers on the margin of the existing system end up by selling their services to the ingenious molders of public opinion of which the Luce combine is the most typical. (We may again refer the reader to Mary McCarthy's "Portrait of the Intellectual," in which the transition from one world to another is skillfully drawn.) Of course, those who move from the precarious world of the alienated avant-garde to the high-powered organization of the slick disseminators of prefabricated ideas pay a price in loss of creative talent and power of analysis. Frequently, however, the body social of bohemia loses nothing by their desertion, for they mostly belong to the type whose relation to bohemia is parasitical. This parasitism serves as an apprenticeship for their subsequent careers, as it enables them to acquire a glibness of expression which fits in splendidly with their later efforts. Also, their usual origin, as that of the Yale man intellectual portrayed by Mary McCarthy, is in the upper middle class, and thus their shift to the uptown milieu is by way of being a homecoming, a return to that which was only tentatively rejected. This return is not necessarily motivated in a purely economic fashion, as motives of this order are often subordinated to the need for relatedness to the dominant social trends, the compulsion to break away from the desperate sense of isolation which is the lot of those living on the fringes of the social structure.

The ex-expatriates who return to the bourgeois fold are but a minor part of the group which we might describe as the fellow-travelers of the haute bourgeoisie. Not all types of journalists, however, should be included in this category. There are some on the big city dailies who are nothing more than artisans of the phrase, without cultural pretensions. Then there are honest journeymen who divorce their journalistic tasks from their existence as a whole, groping to understand what underlies their obscure conflicts. They nourish a secret desire to write a novel or a muckraking book, but it seems as though the time for such independent writing never arrives. So they drink more than their average fellow-Americans, acquiring a protective layer of cynicism to prevent their really sensitive skins from being continually rubbed the wrong way.

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The hard core of the stratum that lives off ideas, of which the Lucites are the most typical representatives, are the graduates of the fashionable Eastern colleges whose social origin is in the upper income-bracket groups. This is no coincidence, of course. Those placed on the policy-making level of the hierarchy favor the employment of this type because of their knowledge of his reliability both in the production of desired copy and in the creation of an *esprit de corps* derived from class and status. Family, which in America means a background of several generations of wealth and identification with approved ethnic groups, is a major criterion of employment. Those who lack the proper qualifications must assimilate the manners, dress, and attitudes of the favored group if they desire to rise in the organization. The fellow-travelers of the haute bourgeoisie often regard themselves as "liberals," that is to say, they have no objections to strategic renovations in the existing social structure provided their position remains secure. In addition to their "liberalism" they have a superficial acquaintance with what has been traditionally considered "intellectual" subject matter. They have Proust and Joyce and Mann prominently placed on their bookshelves and they command a store of epigrammatic erudition gleaned from disparate corners of the intellectual world. This lends them that masterful glibness of sophisticated philistinism in which their copy abounds.

Their way of life follows the pattern of the upper middle class—in dress, manners, and tone. Mating flexibility makes a succession of marriage partners an accepted routine, even though the marriages must be arranged through the proper church channels with florid social embellishment and due notice in the newspapers. Their rhythm of life changes with the quick shifts they are called upon to make in manipulation of ideas which best serve the demands of their employers. On occasion they will confess their distress at these demands. They are doubtful of the quality of the work they turn out, yet they are deprived of an alternative mode of life, being limited by years of doing the proper thing and by an acquaintance no more than casual with the internal rigors of the intellectual process. They have been digesting for short-run purposes of exploitation the work of more scrupulous and imaginative men much too long. These popular journalists make much of the justification that their labors lift the general level of culture among the masses. But the truth is that for the masses they have a lofty contempt.

The stratification in the fellow-travelers of the haute bourgeoisie is more or less identical with that found in the nonintellectual mem-

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bers of the class. It breaks down along the lines of schools attended, affluence, and the ethnic group of the individual. Consequently there operates among them a covert yet pervasive anti-Semitism—a genteel social prejudice not to be equated with the lower class counterpart of this disease. The anti-Semitism of the lower class variety has Hitlerian overtones, whereas the more fashionable sort has its mainsprings in the social life of upper middle class suburbia. It manifests itself in an overpolite attitude toward Jews, a mixture of unconscious guilt and deliberate condescension. The social lines are not drawn hard and fast, for Jews of the same class are accepted with reservations. Jews of lower class origin, however, must bear the stigma of complete exclusion.

This group's way of life has been well portrayed in the novels of J. P. Marquand, who himself so well typifies its outlook and mannerisms. As writers the members of this group possess a small technical competence, and when working in a wider frame of social reference they have the ingenuity to dress up stale ideas in glittering generalities. Their intellectualism is self-conscious and ornamental. If they suffer a high degree of neurosis it is not because they have had to play the pariah-role of the avant-garde but rather because of the disintegration of family ties in their social milieu. The relationship between their parents is usually devoid of organic quality; the percentage of divorce is high; the children are pampered, it is true, but only in a kind of abstract fashion which corresponds more to social convention than to integral feeling. These people are in a sense the historical counterparts of the enlightened aristocrats of pre-revolutionary France. In their case, however, it is quite unlikely that in the near future they will fall victim to a political convulsion.

The ideologists are those intellectuals whose ideas and policy are derived from the Communist Party. We may mark them off into concentric circles, each circle taking in larger areas of the American social structure. Obviously not all Communists or fellow-travelers are to be considered intellectuals; it is nevertheless true that under the guidance of the party leadership or as convenient pawns the intellectuals play an important part in the Communist movement. The dupes or pawns among them make up a group of totalitarian liberals and other intellectuals who, in escaping bewilderment and painful ambiguity, find their way into the numerous front organizations.

These groups have only one use for ideas—though the attitude that makes this use possible becomes less marked as it radiates out-

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ward from the party core—and that is to manipulate them in such a way as to further the party's struggle for power. Ideas and values are thus not considered as ends in themselves but only as weapons for political bludgeoning. In the inner circle of disciplined Stalinism the instrumentation of ideas is wielded according to the party version of Marxism—a secular faith to which the comrades have sworn absolute fealty. For these fervent believers the truth has been given once and for all, hence to them ideas are either adaptable to current party ends or to be dismissed as hostile to the class interests of the "proletariat." There is no need to meet opposing concepts on their own ground, for their logical truth or falsity is irrelevant by Stalinist standards. The problem is "to unmask" them, that is to say, to discredit them by exposing their origin in the class structure. No recognition of the fact that the truth of ideas is in no sense identical with the explanation of their origin is allowed to discourage the Stalinists. In the *New Masses* the job of smearing and discrediting is done on a crude level, while in a journal like *Science and Society* the job is done with considerably more finesse, as its contributors are drawn from the followers of Stalinism in the academy. The two magazines share the same general orientation, but in the latter the language and tone are more elevated. Here too, however, ideas are measured by one criterion, and that is whether their role is "reactionary," a protean concept, or "progressive," a concept even more protean.

Both the intellectual who holds a party-card and his brother who, for strategic reasons, holds no such card, conceive of themselves as missionaries whose function is to soften up those liberal members of the intelligentsia who are peculiarly susceptible to the party creed. Of course, the creed is never presented in an abstract manner; worrisome issues of the day, especially as they refer to international affairs, are used as the basis for persuasion. No group since the early Christians has displayed such dogged devotion to propaganda. They have surely taken St. Augustine's dictum to heart, for they work on the assumption that in order to understand one must believe. And their belief in the rightness of their cause passeth all understanding to those not under the spell.

These fellow-travelers are to be found in every segment of the social structure. The avowed party-member stands self-exposed and is therefore not as effective as the fellow-traveler who operates in an academic outpost or in some liberal journal. The latter understands how to discover the weak spots of the free-floating liberal. He is adept in exploiting the liberal ideologically, for he has steeled himself to

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iron discipline so as not to betray heat or vindictiveness in argument. Hence he leads a double life. Outwardly his manner conforms to the liberal's standards of decorum and sanity, but he gives himself away when discussing matters not politically relevant; on such occasions his smugness or inquisitorial attitude makes plain what he wishes to conceal. You can tell him by the look of pained patience with which he listens to those liberals who criticize the Soviet fatherland or its doctrines and by his tendency to make use of such epithets as "social democrat" and "fascist" on any and all occasions.

Each of the groups we have considered affects the larger American social pattern and is in turn affected by it. Thus the impact of the contemporary crisis which has forced America into a position of world responsibility for the first time, is likely to alter considerably the role of each of these groups, both as intellectuals and as citizens. Further, the ever-growing politicalization of intellectual life makes more and more difficult a disinterested theoretical approach. The value systems by which the intellectual operates professionally may come into conflict with the values to which he adheres in his personal and social life. If he is to reconcile these conflicting claims, he must at least be conscious of what his extra-intellectual values are. The will to believe usually leads only to elaborate rationalizations.

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Poetry

THE SHAPE OF THE FIRE

1

What's this? A dish for fat lips.
Who says? A nameless stranger.
Is he a bird or a tree? Not everyone can tell.
Water recedes to the crying of spiders.
An old scow bumps over black rocks.
A cracked pod calls.
Mother me out of here. What more will the bones allow?
Will the sea give the wind suck? A toad folds into a stone.
These flowers are all fangs. Comfort me, fury.
Wake me, witch, we'll do the dance of rotten sticks.
Shale loosens. Marl reaches into the field. Small birds pass over water.
Spirit, come near. This is only the edge of whiteness.
I can't laugh at a procession of dogs.
In the hour of ripeness the tree is barren.
The she-bear mopes under the hill.
Mother, mother, stir from your cave of sorrow.
A low mouth laps water. Weeds, weeds, how I love you.
The arbor is cooler. Farewell, farewell, fond worm.
The warm comes without sound.

2

Where's the eye?
The eye's in the sty.
The ear's not here
Beneath the hair,
When I took off my clothes
To find a nose,
There was only one shoe
For the waltz of To,
The pinch of Where.

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Time for the flat-headed man. I recognize that listener,
Him with the platitudes and rubbery doughnuts,
Melting at the knees, a varicose horror.
Hello, hello. My nerves knew you, dear boy.
Have you come to unhinge my shadow?
Last night I slept in the pits of a tongue.
The silver fish ran in and out of my special bindings;
I grew tired of the ritual of names and the assistant keeper of the molluscs:
Up over a viaduct I came, to the snakes and sticks of another winter,
A two-legged dog hunting a new horizon of howls.
The wind sharpened itself on a rock;
A voice sang:

Pleasure on ground
Has no sound,
Easily maddens
The uneasy man.

Who, careless, slips
In coiling ooze
Is trapped to the lips,
Leaves more than shoes;

Must pull off clothes
To jerk like a frog
On belly and nose
From the sucking bog.

My meat eats me. Who waits at the gate?
Mother of quartz, your words writhe into my ear.
Renew the light, lewd whisper.

3

The wasp waits.
The edge cannot eat the centre.
The grape glistens.
The path tells little to the serpent.
An eye comes out of the wave.
The journey from flesh is longest.
A rose sways least.
The redeemer comes a dark way.

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4

Morning-fair, follow me further back
Into that minnowy world of weeds and ditches,
When the herons floated high over the white houses,
And the little crabs slipped into silvery craters,
When the sun for me glinted the sides of a sand-grain,
And my intent stretched over the buds at their first trembling.

That air and shine: and the flicker's loud summer call;
The bearded boards in the stream and the all of apples;
The glad hen on the hill; and the trellis humming.
Death was not. I lived in a simple drowse:
Hands and hair moved through a dream of wakening blossoms.
Rain sweetened the cave and the dove still called;
The flowers leaned on themselves, the flowers in hollows;
And love, love sang toward.

5

To have the whole air!—
The light, the full sun
Coming down on the flowerheads,
The tendrils turning slowly,
A slow snail-lifting, liquescent;
To be by the rose
Rising slowly out of its bed,
Still as a child in its first loneliness;
To see cyclamen veins become clearer in early sunlight,
And mist lifting, drifting out of the brown cat-tails;
To stare into the after-light, the glitter left on the lake's surface
When the sun has fallen behind a wooden island;
To follow the drops sliding from a lifted oar,
Held up, while the rower breathes, and the small boat drifts quietly
shoreward;
To know that light falls and fills, often without our knowing,
As an opaque vase fills to the brim from a quick pouring,
Fills and trembles at the edge yet does not flow over,
Still holding and feeding the stem of the contained flower.

THEODORE ROETHKE

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HYANNISPORT IN NOVEMBER

The braving geese fly down the Cape,
Eluding the icy Hunter's snare
And, hanging through the wheeling world,
Look down upon the districts where

The unfrocked diplomat reposed
And wives of middle-west tycoons
Paced up and down the pilgrim strand
Or paused beside the summer dunes.

The taut young matrons played with death
To please the elected of the Port
And teach the damned the graces of
A neat and necessary sport.

The shampooed debutantes sat down
Upon their pleasant cultural lag,
Or sank into the gelded blue
Beyond the flagstone and the flag.

In ecstasy the sun-drunk East
Shut up shop when Fall was hung
On acid boughs that ate away
The oriole's enraptured tongue.

Out of the blood of Standish's loins
The fatted matriarchs drove West
To wed Christ Cauterized, or seek
The honied Islands of the Blest.

Salt-bleached and bitten by the wind,
The Titan sprawls upon Cape Cod:
His blue-white flesh, His sun-caked brain
Are generations unto God.

Heliotrope, the Winter's eye
And old transfixing reverie
Rehearse what cycled ages slid
Into the sere and silent sea.

RICHARD CHASE

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Paris Letter

A MINOR SCANDAL

WILL ALL THOSE who believe that Life is Worth Living kindly raise their right arm? Hold it for a moment, while I count the stony-faced jerks who haven't budged. Not because they have any idea whatsoever about Life (who does?) but simply out of principle—what business have I got fumbling with their psyche, etc., etc. It is clear, in any case, that they are good Americans, everyone knows that in our country Life is real, Life is earnest. Whereas here, in the miraculously intact façade of the ruined continent, the grave is indeed the goal. Here in Paris summer has come, the streets are sticky with the heat, the monuments are half-covered under the enveloping sand, and Life is completely senseless.

Is it not characteristic of my incurably literary mind that I begin by telling a lie? I am not in Paris at all, but in a lovely Spanish villa on the Basque coast. Moreover, although I have been here only a few days, I haven't read a newspaper in a month; and I'm quite incapable of telling you what is happening in the capital. I haven't been to the Surrealist exposition at the Galerie Maeght. I haven't read Jean Paulhan's latest epistle to the members of the National Writers' Committee. At regular intervals I receive a copy of *Fontaine, Poesie 47* or *Les Temps modernes,* note duly that J. P. Sartre is still going on and on about "What is Literature," and find that I have nothing to cut the pages with. Sartre's idea of his role as a *chef de file* involves systematically misunderstanding his predecessors: this would make amusing reading, along with Breton's dignified counterattack. And Artaud's screaming damnation of the body, part of which I heard him read like an hallucination, on a corner of the Rue Jacob, the other night. And Boris Vian's animadversions of Simone de Merlartre, Sarleau de Pontrevoir, Merloir de Beauvartre, etc. But there you are—Breton, Sartre, Vian, Max-Pol Fouchet, all are defeated for lack of a paper-cutter.

For some time now, I have had the feeling that there is a monstrous inconscience in the world's return to Peace. My friend X is having another baby and writing another review. C is having another divorce. *Barman, on ca remettre ça.* The evening papers in Paris are running six-column spreads on the annual cross-country bicycle race. . . . A few days before I left Paris, I went to see a young man who lives with his

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wife and child in an immense and shadowy bourgeois apartment on the Boulevard Raspail. We were at cross purposes, as usual, because he was hoping that I could find him a job, which I doubt; and I was hoping that he would talk about Buchenwald, where he spent the final months of the war. We compromised for a while by talking about the Front Humain, a group of ex-resistance leaders who have decided to break out of the vicious circles of French politics but don't know where or how to begin. For the moment, they are publishing pamphlets to remind the world that atomic war is approaching. My young friend was having trouble lighting his cigarette. He managed to get it into his mouth, he managed to strike a match, but his hand shook horribly and—though he must by now be used to being blind—he seemed unable, interminably, to touch the cigarette with flame at the moment of inhalation. The room was very dark, L's wife kept slipping past like a ghost, I had been sitting deep in my armchair, feeling tired and letting the shadows engulf me. When I excused myself belatedly for not helping, he waved his skeletal hand and, referring no doubt at once to my excuses and to a book I had mentioned, about Buchenwald, he murmured: "A matter of no importance, *cela ne tire pas à conséquence.*"

About nine-tenths of the survivors of Buchenwald have died since their return to France.

II

And that is the phrase that Patrick used, a few hours later, when I told him that Curzio Malaparte was a whore. "A matter of no importance," said Patrick, "I am in favor of him." (About everyone and everything, Patrick says: *je suis pour,* or *je suis contre.*) Our own twentieth-century species of literary whore, interchangeable from one regime to another, Ilya Malaparte and Curzio Ehrenburg, Konstantin Aragon and Louis Simonov, the ink-stained darlings of the corporate states, with the practiced bedside manner, the quick and lascivious tongue, the discreet reek of advance-guard perfume, that most useful aroma of half-forgotten youth and ardor. Is not literature too a matter of no importance? Like those propositions which the instrumentalists invidiously defined as metaphysical, when it could be demonstrated that no measurable difference followed from their denial or their affirmation. The war is over, we are returning to Peace, making love, making literature, under false names, about false names, and it makes no difference whatsoever. Very well. I had told Patrick, in the café where—for the first time in a year—I had bumped into him, that I was trying to decide whether to go off to one of Claude-Edmonde Magny's "surprise parties," as she insists on calling them, and at which the prima donna of the evening was to be Curzio Malaparte. "You are wrong, as usual," said Patrick. "Malaparte is very *malin,* a true saboteur, and highly regarded by my great friend Percy Winner." Patrick was in one of his periods of

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thyroid disturbance, when his hard and stocky body suddenly swells with uneasy flesh. He had been batting around for two nights without sleep, he was pale, flabby, unshaven, and a little drunk. But very earnest. "It's that woman who's a menace," he said. "*Je suis contre.* Besides, flaying's too good for her after her article about Bataille, in the *Cahiers du Sud.*"

Here, for a moment, I stop. There is indeed something monstrous in the world's return to Peace: going back to our games, after what we have seen. But if that is monstrous, this is dangerous: literature conceived as a bullfight, as Michel Leiris says. I am telling a true story, naming real names. The very excitement I feel is suspect. Nevertheless, if literature is to be conceived as a bullfight, there must be real danger. Patrick, for one, can gore me, for he calls forth my admiration and my despair. Built like a bull, with an enormous, beautiful head on a massive neck, when he says "Kaplan? *Je suis contre!*" my heart sinks and I long for the courage to brain him. Even when he says *je suis pour* I am enraged and humiliated at my gratitude. But braining him would not help, really, for Patrick is obviously and persistently somebody, and there's no way of doing away with that. An American citizen by some freak of birth, he is the most gifted young poet I know in France; and he seems wonderfully expert at living his divided life, as an International Civil Servant on one hand, and as a strange and malefic youth on the other. And because he belongs so peremptorily to a secret aristocracy, Patrick goes off-handedly about Paris and berates innocent, well-meaning people who are straightway stricken dumb, paralyzed, suddenly aware that they are not so innocent as they had supposed.

On our way to my apartment, where Patrick was to shave, I told him that we could not, on pain of death, forget the ghosts of Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and Matthausen. Malaparte's *Kaputt* was one way—a characteristically slick and abject way—of forgetting them. Malaparte lied about them, jerked facile tears over them, transformed them into familar and meretricious props. The world returns to Peace as man represses his apprehension of death; whores were useful on both occasions. . . . Patrick was not listening, or so it seemed: in his aura of spiritual pornography, alcohol, drugs, sexual experiments, the whole mysterious business of "extending the limits of possibility" and staking one's life in the process (which, by now, seemed so desperately outmoded in France, except precisely for those who really staked their lives), such considerations were inevitably paltry. I remembered the Italian boy who was torn to death by the S.S. dogs in Matthausen. From the stake to which he was bound, as the dogs began to tear at his meager flesh, he filled the entire camp with his cries: "*Pietà, signor commandante, pietà!*" Is there no relation between that cry and the raucous scream of Artaud?

At my place, Patrick shaved, emerged from the bathroom with

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his collar bespattered with blood, and took possession of my last bottle of scotch. Trickles of blood from three cuts in his cheek joined at his chin and ran thickly down his neck. I gave him my handkerchief and begged him to wipe his face.

"Now we shall go to the surprise party of that female graphomaniac. You will introduce me as Da Costa, the Portuguese consul."

"You forget," I told him with dignity, "that I am an ex-embassy type. Da Costa is not the name of the Portuguese consul."

"A matter of no importance. We shall speak Spanish, through the nose, and nobody will know the difference."

"Perfectamente."

I was drinking scotch on an empty stomach, and beginning to feel a trifle rocky myself. But on we went to Claude-Edmonde Magny's surprise party. The surprise would be for her. All this year, I told Patrick, I had been reading books, brochures, and articles about concentration camps. In French alone, there were several hundred titles; and in German there were probably many more, including the invaluable collection, *Konzentrationslager Buchenwald,* and the *S. S. Universe,* the recent work of Eugen Kogon (who plays a curious role in Rousset's novel). A Polish journalist with whom I had had a long talk on the system of Auschwitz (where his son was murdered before his eyes) told me that he knew at least sixty "serious" titles in Polish. (Desideratum: a humorous study of Auschwitz.) The population of the camps, after 1940, was always predominantly Polish and Russian (Auschwitz alone, at one point, contained more than 200,000 prisoners!), so that it would hardly be surprising if my friend's projected bibliography of Slavic works turned out to be more interesting than my list of titles available here.

"Please," said Patrick, annoyed, "will you kindly get off my ear?"

We were walking along the Rue Delambre, with a vague idea of getting something to eat before going to our party. No doubt, all you Freudian janitors in New York will immediately assume that I have been reading these works—only a few of which are distinguished by the slightest ray of insight—out of a submerged and bottomless sadism, gobbling them up ever more fiendishly in accordance with the law of diminishing returns. Or out of a sense of guilt, for not having perished in a gas-chamber. And no doubt you will be right, on both counts. Patrick, however, who is anything but vulgar, assumed nothing at all; in fact, he seemed not even interested. Nevertheless, I reminded him of the camps we had come across in North Africa, where people had continued to rot and die for months after our armies controlled the country; and how hard some of his friends (among whom, I believe, was Percy Winner) had worked to get the diplomats and brass-hats at Allied Force Headquarters to take these pastoral institutions out of the

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hands of the Vichy authorities. The interned Communist deputies were released immediately, even (if my memory is correct) before the assassination of Darlan: Mr. Bogomolov had his entries at the Hotel Saint-Georges. But for all the others, it was a long, long wait, in desert hell-holes which, innocent as we were, seemed to us as terrible as man could devise.

Talking to these people as they emerged from the camps, I heard for the first time the names of Portuguese prisons, of Miranda in Spain, Gurs, Fresnes, Drancy, Vernet, and Les Milles in France; and for the first time I fully realized the existence—and the special importance—of what Rousset calls the concentration-camp universe. Already, two things were clear:

First, the camps were not a specifically German phenomenon. The Nazis came prepared with an ideology of human abasement, a deliberate desire to foster sadistic behavior patterns in German men, and a romantic exaltation in flouting the gods, transgressing traditional moral law. Further, they were (especially after 1936) faced with problems of production which suggested that the camps which had been conceived, as it were, as a pleasure and a luxury, as well as a means of terrorizing the German population, could also become a great, nationalized industry, a source of wealth and power for the German state. (There is a book by Germaine Tillon which adds up the balance-sheet of Ravensbruck and finds that it was an immensely profitable enterprise.) The immediate result of this was a slight but general bettering of conditions and, after 1940, the camps were organized by the hundreds, with all the minute thoroughness, the maniacal attention to detail, and the grotesque solemnity which characterize the planned activities of a modern totalitarian state. Nevertheless, and before one had access to such details, it was clear that the phenomenon of internment combined with forced labor, i.e., the concentration camp, was an essential function of modern (police) power, a normal mode of repression and production, as well as a specifically twentieth-century form of the Terror. As such, it existed in greater or lesser degree in every country of Europe.

Secondly, the camps were societies; their inner organization tended to make manifest, in terms of the most unprecedented violence, drama, tragedy, even of humor, the tensions and the political-moral problems of Society itself. The camps in the south of France where, during one period at least, whole families were interned together, and the Displaced Persons camps in postwar Germany, present this aspect most obviously; but David Rousset's brilliant books on the German camps show that, even in such hells as Dora and Matthausen, social groupings were formed, the struggle for power took place between Poles and Germans, for example, or between the politicals and the common-law prisoners.

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As in "free" society, the ruling strata, the guards and the prisoner-bureaucrats, tended to impose their values upon their subjects, and the camp population—from the distinguished ex-professor to the illiterate thief—tended to accept these values intimately, with the propitiatory meekness of children. Thus, for example, orderliness in the barracks, where disorder meant collective punishment, was far more highly valued than generosity, which was a dangerous sign of weakness; and the professor, who was incapable of hammering a nail, tried to pass himself off as a carpenter. In this respect, no experience of our time is so rich, so suggestive, so revealing—and I am speaking with reference to the evolution of what we call our civilization—as the techniques by which the motley peoples of the German camps, speaking every conceivable language and recruited from all social strata, were "depersonalized" and reduced to an animal dependence. A Polish writer, Z. L. Zaleski, tells how, upon his arrival in the camp, he was submitted to "an intense training in accordance with the precept of 'temporal dispossession.'" Night and day, he and his comrades were assailed with unexpected and senseless orders. Obedience had to be instantaneous, of course, lest the normal brutalities take on a punitive, perhaps fatal, character. "No hesitation, no reflection. . . . Later, in Barrack 60 of the Little Camp, our block-chief, a 'comrade' prisoner like ourselves, followed the same rule: do no matter what, no matter when: obey fast, fast, fast! . . . The statistics of the frequency of terms used in our relations with the block-authorities would certainly give a crushing majority to the words *schnell* and *raus*." This insistence on instant obedience, coupled with the absolutely arbitrary nature of the commands, is one of the constant features of camp life, not only in Germany but in camp life everywhere. *Der Mensch ist nicht geboren frei zu sein*—this is the first lesson the "concentrated" citizen must learn.

"Have you finished?" asked Patrick.

"Don't sneer," I said. "You and Bataille go on and on about human possibility. The camps have also extended the limits of human possibility, in some rather unexpected ways."

"The trouble with you," said Patrick, "is that you have no conversation."

By this time, we were approaching the grim apartment building on the Rue Schoelcher, and we decided, to hell with dinner. We went upstairs and were greeted by various people, none of whom knew Patrick.

"Da Costa, the Portuguese consul," I said.

"No entiendo el francès," said Patrick.

"What's going on down there," called Claude-Edmonde, who was upstairs in her loft.

"It's Kaplan," said Marcelle Sibon. "He's brought the Portuguese consul." And, turning to Patrick: *"Voulez-vous boire, Monsieur?"*

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"No entiendo el francès," said Patrick, pointing his stubby nose at the proffered bottle of armagnac.

"What in the world will we do with him?" said Marcelle in despair.

"Just give him a drink," I said, "and let him go talk to Malaparte. They can talk about their mutual friend, the Spanish ambassador."

Patrick took the glass from Marcelle's hand and went over to sit near Malaparte, whose jaundiced face barely emerged from a forest of lace and crinoline: he was being lionized, on the sofa. As for me, I went to the buffet and began eating sandwiches, feeling terribly hungry and a little sad. The odd thing was that, on the shelf beside the buffet, in the midst of a pile of books sent to Claude-Edmonde for review, was Patrick's recent little volume, *Sur le bord.* I opened it and read as I ate:

Vois autour de nous ces routes car à l'instant
nous allons choisir
D'obsidienne à gauche ce chemin cassant et noir
que hantent les roussettes
De fourrure à droite cette allée rousse qui sent
le géranium
De vapeurs suffocantes de métaux mous de pierres
magnétiques cette route ondulée qui s'ouvre
entre des rideaux de gaze safranée
Il faut d'abord apprendre à marcher
Car il n'y a plus qu'un sol sans loi et la pesanteur
a changé de formule
C'est la saison des opalines il fait bleu à l'ombre
des pollens
*Au jour le jour est mort et les fêtes commencent**

III

That last detail, finding Patrick's poems (which I had never seen before) *on the edge* of the incident which shortly was to explode the

---

*See about us these roads for instantly
we are going to choose
Obsidian on the left this black and broken pathway
haunted by flying-foxes
Furry on the right this reddish alley which smells
of geraniums
Of suffocating vapors of soft metals of magnetic
stones this undulating road which opens
between curtains of saffroned gauze
First we must learn to walk
For now there is only a lawless soil and weight
has altered its formula
This is the season of the opaline it is blue in the shadow
of the pollens
The day by day is dead and the festivities begin

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evening in scandal, sounds terribly fake; worse, it sounds facile; but it happens to be true, more literally so than much that I have written in these ineffable Paris Letters. Now I sit here, in the Basque country, and reflect that if literature is to be considered as a tauromachy there must indeed be real danger, a danger more radical than Patrick's bloody horns: now what, for example, have I told you about myself?

But if there is danger, there must also be mastery. You cannot stand stupidly and let yourself be gored. There must be grace, intention, courage, cleverness, that supreme impudence of man who triumphs—for a moment!—over the stupid, brutal injustice of death. . . . The camps raise all our problems anew, in an almost intolerable language of pathos and terror. The question of who we are, which turns out to be a question of situating our lives; our freedom and responsibility as prisoners; the political questions, shall we seek power in the camp, in the name of what, and how shall we behave in the face of our masters? To live above the level of the world's return to Peace is actually to raise these questions *at every instant.* That is another reason why we cannot, on pain of death, cease our colloquy with the ghosts of Buchenwald, Dachau, and Dortmund.

Since beginning this letter, I have found a paper-cutter and read part of Sartre's latest installment on "What is Literature?" After exposing with a truculent and joyous *vâcherie* the attitudes of his predecessors, and pointing out why their methods are no longer viable, Sartre has a deeply moving development on the torture of the resistants: "Who will efface that Mass wherein two liberties (i.e. the victim and the tormentor) communed in the destruction of the human? We knew that it was being celebrated all over Paris, while we were eating, sleeping, making love." This, for Sartre (who has written a play about possible attitudes to physical torture) is an exemplary "extreme situation," the very type of situation with which his generation—wherein he includes Camus, Malraux, Koestler, and St. Exupéry—has been centrally preoccupied. The insight is brilliant, and these pages are brilliantly written. The resistants who did not give in "broke the circle of Evil and reaffirmed the human, for themselves, for us, even for their torturers. . . . Everything conspired to discourage them: so many signs around them, these faces bent over them, this pain within them, all joined to make them believe that they were only insects, that man was the impossible dream of roaches and bugs and that they would awake as vermin, like everybody else. Man was something they had to invent with their martyred flesh, with their hunted thoughts which were already betraying them; beginning from nothing, for nothing, in absolute gratuitousness; for it is within the human that one can distinguish means and ends, values, preferences, but they were still at the stage of the world's creation and they had only

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to decide sovereignly whether, within it, there would be something more than the reign of the animal. They refused to talk, and man was born of their silence."

(I should like, in passing, to remind my placid countrymen who sneer easily at Sartre's multiform and hurried career that it is precisely by virtue of his "anti-serious" attitude, by choosing to live and write as he does, that Sartre has recreated the very notion of the French man of letters.)

But how, after the camps, can we conceive of the extreme situation as a desperate solitude? The decisive choice—was it really made "without witnesses, without help, without hope, even without faith"? Here Sartre interpolates into our history the fundamental "founding" act of the existentialist, the man for whom existence is prior to essence. But *our* extreme situation involves, not a single act of heroism, but a long behavior, the determinations and ends of which are as subtle and complex as social man himself. The story of the camps, in Germany and elsewhere, is wrought in very large part of men who did not break under torture but who, *in the camp,* in the diabolic mesh of decision and consequence, insensibly became the torturers of their fellow-prisoners.

The French, incorrigibly literary, complacently stewing in their glorious rhetorical traditions, were unprepared for the camps. They reacted, by and large, in moral-exclamatory terms. What has been published here leaves one with a series of terrible, shadowy *tableaux,* dantesque visions of human horror and grandeur, circle after circle of torment and despair. Only a few survivors of the camps see them as an enterprise and as a society; and only one, so far as I know, fully grasps their central relevance to the whole situation of modern Western man. David Rousset went to Buchenwald with a thorough training in Marxism (he had been a dissident Communist) and in Sociology (the French species, which seems to ignore the work which has been done since Freud on the psychodynamics of personality). He is a man, moreover, of considerable literary gifts and, above all, possessed of a personality bursting with health, humor, and power: his first book, *L'Univers concentrationnaire,* begins with a quotation from *Ubu enchaîné,* by Alfred Jarry, and blandly—in the form of an epigraph—declares: "There exists a Goering ordinance for the protection of frogs."

I do not propose here to go into a detailed analysis of *L'Univers concentrationnaire,* which is a brief "theoretical' statement of the social structure of Buchenwald, the organization of living quarters, of work, of the camp bureaucracy; still less do I wish to give a protracted account of Rousset's immense novel, *Les Jours de notre mort,* which takes us through a dozen different camps by means of a rather confusing technique of simultaneity. Drawing upon his own experience, and on much of the material published in France and Germany, this remarkable

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writer exposes the mechanisms by which enormous conglomerations of prisoners from every country in Europe were made to serve the purposes of Juggernaut: the production of war materials, the security (not simply social, but intimate and personal) of the Nazi overlords, and the physical destruction of the enemies of the German state. Since the S.S. were by far too few to staff any but the top posts of the bureaucracy (which included the camp police, infirmary, sources of food, clothing, records etc.) they were obliged to call upon the collaboration of prisoners who, in turn, co-opted into their ranks the minor assistants, informers, henchmen, mignons, who were necessary for the maintenance of the S.S. order and the satisfaction of the bureaucrat's desires. And since these posts frequently made the difference between life and death, and in any case procured material advantages which made survival more probable, they were the object of a constant, ferocious competition between prisoners and, later, between organized groups of prisoners. Prisoner-bureaucrats were better fed, better housed, and better clothed than the plebeians; they were armed with clubs and whips, and were themselves rarely beaten. (It is worth noting that the physical aspect of the prisoners was crucial to their survival: just as any cop will immediately assume an aggressive attitude to a tramp, and a relatively respectful one to a solid-looking citizen, the camp authorities measured out their brutality in accordance with the precise degree of their victims' vestimentary dilapidation. Whoever controls the camp must control the *Kleidenkammer.*) To conserve their power, the bureaucrats were obliged to exercise it in line with the methods and the philosophy of their masters. They were obliged to obtain maximum work and maximum discipline in the areas of their power. *They were obliged to collaborate actively in the entire enterprise of the camps.*

This is the point. And this is why Rousset's vision of the camp functionaries differs so radically from that of other witnesses, plebeians who lived through their nightmare with little or no inkling of the intrigues and the struggles which went on constantly among the bureaucrats. Dr. Wetterwald, for example (in *L'Enfer de Buchenwald*) saw the functionaries, the *Stubendienst,* the *Arbeitsdienst,* the *Blockaltester,* simply as infamous brutes, vile and sadistic instruments of the S.S. power. The S.S., in their clean uniforms and shining boots, were distant gods who (especially after 1940) rarely stooped to beat or kill the filthy, stinking, bedraggled, and starving prisoners. The beatings were administered by other prisoners—and the stranglings, too. Rousset, who spoke the Marxist language, was able to approach the German Communists who, by the time he arrived in Buchenwald, were virtually in complete control of the camp. He learned that the power they exercised had been won after a long, costly, bloody struggle against the common-law criminals, who had ruled the camps from their inception until the

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outbreak of total war. He knew that the S.S. maintained the politicals in power for one reason only: the directives from Berlin called for production, and the criminals were anarchical and incapable of organizing work. The politicals, of course, were frequently corrupted by their power, even to the point where the ruling fraction was obliged to take action against some of its members. For Wetterwald, however, the *Blockaltester* was a dangerous brute with a club, whatever his political antecedents.

But, says Rousset, when lists were made up for a transport to Dora, which meant a very high mortality en route and almost certain death for the survivors in Dora, the prisoner-functionaries were able to manipulate the lists and thus, at least, choose who was going to die. It was in this way, for example, through the clandestine liaison between the French Communist cell and the German Communists who ruled the camp, that many French intellectuals were removed from the lists and, temporarily at least, saved from extermination. The nature of this feat can be appreciated if one remembers that all this, the struggles within the bureaucracy, the trading of life for life, the sordid give and take between the ragamuffin tyrants who controlled one area of power or another in the camp, went on in utter secrecy: even the mass of Communists in the plebe, infinitely more bedraggled and hungry than the bureaucrats, could not be allowed to suspect what was going on. Betrayal meant disaster. The S.S. punished the merest suspicion of prisoner-organization with death.

You must read Rousset's books. I mention them now only in order to reinforce my point about the central and tremendously dramatic relevance of the camps, of the experience of internment, to our times. These are the days when whole nations are interned, when millions of men, women and children are, properly speaking, formed in camps and barracks, when all human society tends to assume the patterns of a camp. Meeting Rousset for the first time, I plunged dizzily into his world of gargantuan humor and vigor and I was sure, as I listened to him tell his fantastic stories of the Ubuesque aspects of Buchenwald, that man could master the Terror. Now, I am not so sure. We were at the home of René Menard, the editor of a series of *Cahiers,* published by an association of ex-prisoners. Rousset, round and bouncing with energy, a shock of curly black hair constantly falling over his glasses, kept assailing his comrades with memories, a kaleidoscope of horror, obscenity, grotesquerie and surprise, roaring with laughter over the patness and malignity of his own intelligence, his understanding, his mastery of this immensely comic Inferno. *"Te souviens-tu? . . . Te rappelles-tu? . . . Impayable . . . ébourrifant!"* And what a profound joy he drew from his pipe, which he kept stuffing with his stubby, hairy finger! Now that I have read his books and find myself distressed by

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his mechanistic conception of behavior, by the tautological character of his political views (but does he still hold them?), I am nonetheless reassured by the magnificence and subtlety of his vision. What we must get through our heads, those of us who refuse the world's inconscient return to Peace, is that we are all survivors; and insofar as we survive, it is with some measure of Rousset's profoundly human force and humor. If the category has any meaning at all, this is a very great man.

L'Univers concentrationnaire ends on this note of strength. To the "positive account" of the camps, Rousset credits the "dynamic realization of the power and the beauty of the fact of living, in itself, brutal, entirely devoid of all superstructures, of living even through the worst collapses, or the gravest retreats. A sensual freshness of joy constructed on the completest knowledge of the ruins and, in consequence, a hardening in action, a stubbornness in decisions, in short a deeper and more intensely creative health. For some, confirmation; for the greatest number, discovery, and a breath-taking one: the springs of idealism laid bare; the burst mystification brings to light in the nakedness of the concentration-camp universe the dependence of man on economic and social scaffoldings, the true material relations upon which behavior is founded. . . . Finally, the passionate discovery of humor, not as a personal projection, but as the objective structure of the universe."

Les Jours de notre mort, however, probes more deeply into the great problems of political action. One feels, here, that Rousset is no longer sure of himself, nor convinced of the adequacy of his Marxist equipment; and perhaps that is one reason why he cast this book in the unfamiliar form of a novel. Rousset's chief insight, the analogy of the camps with society, is also the source of his chief error, which consists in displacing the question. To say that the worst evils of our society are engendered by the putrescence of an economic system is a truism, and in that broad sense the camps and all their horrors are a "product" of capitalism. But to say this is, in reality, to say very little about the camps—and about society. For the particular horrors with respect to which we are called upon to take a position are directly related to specific attempts to *provide in action an answer to the general crisis.* Granting, for example, even that the Co mmunist control of the bureaucracy meant saving from physical destruction a larger percentage of Communists than would otherwise have been saved, it saved them in such a way and under such conditions, that the survivors can only function today as the docile instruments of another police-power in Germany, namely the N.K.V.D. If one accepts, if one even compromises with, the totalitarian answer, one is obliged in the end to accept the camps.

(I should have liked here to quote the long passage in which an S.S. justifies the whole system of the camps in much the same terms as

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Rousset tends to justify the role of the politicals, the majority German Communists who, when the Allied troops reached Buchenwald, were obliged to flee for their lives with the S.S. The detailed story of the last days of Buchenwald, the attempt of the S.S. to evacuate the camp, the hesitations of the camp bureaucrats—who had defended the turpitudes which were inseparable from their power on the grounds that their power alone could prevent the physical liquidation of the entire camp population—all this offers some of the most dramatic and revealing political instruction since Kronstadt.)

By remaining on the plane of general causality, Rousset neglects one of the most important lessons of the camps. The great political problem of our time is not to demonstrate the malignant disorder of capitalism, but to face up to the question: what comes next? The camps, as the S.S. understood, are an answer to that question. The Soviet regime offers an analogous answer, and it is no accident that a greater percentage of the Soviet population is interned than anywhere else in the world. Can anyone but the sleepwalkers, who live in the illusion that the nineteenth century would go on and on if people only stopped watching the calendar, fail to recognize in this formulation the decisive political issue of the camps? We must decide what comes next, *what comes now.* Our behavior, as prisoners and as free men—for we are all prisoners and all free men—cannot be sanctioned by appealing to a distant and ready-made future. There is no future other than the one our present creates. And it is in our behavior, as prisoners and as free men, that we decide what meaning the whole adventure shall have.

IV

Eating Claude-Edmonde's sandwiches and reading her copy of *Sur le bord,* I was suddenly filled with enthusiasm. I took the volume over to Patrick, who was just receiving another libation from Marcelle Sibon and murmuring stubbornly: *"No entiendo el francès."* I told him that he had understood, *poetica* if not *politicamente,* that the answer began by refusing to function in the world's systems of servitudes. By refusing the circles of power and subjection.

Ton pays c'est le mien et c'est celui des nègres
Songe au nombre de drapeaux qu'on pourrait
tailler dans les robes des prêtres morts
Qu'y avait-il encore ah oui cette couche de glace
fondante
*Sous laquelle il est interdit par la loi d'aller se noyer**

*Your country is mine and that of the Negroes
Think of the number of flags one could cut from
the gowns of the dead priests
What else was there ah yes that layer of melting ice
Under which it was forbidden by law to go and drown
oneself

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Nous avons glissé sur sa mélancolique blancheur
Pour nous trouver soudain devant des maisons
mortes depuis des siècles sans imagination
L'une d'elles était recouverte d'un suaire noir
Des vols d'oiseaux transparents se sont échappés
de ses fentes
Défiant les espaces aimantés de la servitude
C'est à ce moment-là qu'a opéré le charme
Miraculeux déclic au franchir d'un seuil
*Usé par des millions de pas captifs**

Patrick beamed with childish pleasure as I pointed to these lines; then he took out his pen, flipped the book open to the title page and wrote: *Pour mon viel (sic!) ami Harold Kaplan. En souvenir de nos années libres. Avec l'amitié de Patrick.*

Delighted, I went back to the buffet and resumed my work on the sandwiches. I had scarcely eaten two or three when the scandal occurred. There was an exchange of conversation between Patrick and Malaparte. Patrick dashed his glass into Malaparte's face, stood up and, forgetting that he was the Portuguese consul, said: *"Monsieur, vous êtes une ordure!"* Malaparte reacted slowly, with the ponderous dignity of a famous man. He sat in the couch and wiped the armagnac from his parchment-colored face, while Patrick stood there and repeated, in French, "Sir, you are offal! Do you hear me, sir, you are filth!" At last Curzio Malaparte rose to his feet and, addressing himself severely to Claude-Edmonde Magny, who was wringing her hands, shuffling her feet and murmuring unintelligibly, with that completely gaga look people get when they are at a loss for words, "Madame," he said sternly, "you invite me to your house—and what happens? I am insulted!" Having delivered this announcement, he continued to wipe his face, which was now quite dry.

"You are pure filth, sir," Patrick was intoning. "Unadulterated offal."

Marcelle Sibon rushed up to me and told me, for godsakes, to take him away, he was drunk. So I took him away. Patrick was indeed drunk, but perfectly lucid; he allowed himself to be led away, muttering imprecations. On the way down I told him that now I should have to

*We slipped over its melancholy whiteness
To find ourselves suddenly before houses dead for
centuries without imagination
One of them was covered over with a black burial-cloth
Flights of transparent birds escaped from its cracks
Defying the magnetized spaces of servitude
It is at that moment the charm worked
Miraculous click at the crossing of a threshold
Worn down by millions of captive steps

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face the wrath of Claude-Edmonde, if ever she would speak to me again, all because of his boorishness. A matter of no importance, he said. *Cela ne tire pas à conséquence.* All he had done was to tell Malaparte that a great friend of his, one Percy Winner, had spoken much to him, Patrick, of Curzio Malaparte. "Whereupon," said Patrick, his enormous head swelling with rage, "that *ordure,* that *saloperie* had the nerve to tell me that yes, he had known a Percy Winner. A rather feeble chap, he said! He had even given Winner his personal guarantee!"

"What in the world does that mean?" I asked. "What does he mean by his personal guarantee?"

"How should I know," said Patrick irritably. "I made him repeat it three times. Each time he thought I hadn't heard and finally he invited me to come over and sit on the sofa. With a magnanimous gesture, like that! The swine! Winner was the only man in America who defended that *saloperie!*

Personally, I rather doubted that Patrick's rage had really been evoked by Malaparte's offhand treatment of Percy Winner. I was rather surprised, in fact, to learn that Patrick was such a great friend of Winner who (I think) left Africa shortly after we arrived there. In any case, I told Patrick that for the moment I was far more concerned with Claude-Edmonde Magny than with Percy Winner. A matter of no importance, said Patrick, looking around for a bar. Which brought me back to the beginning of our evening. In the bar, I discovered that I was still clutching my copy of Patrick's poems.

Il n'y avait plus alors qu'à se fier à la chance
Derrière nous s'écroulaient les colonnes du
monde de l'indifférence
Mais il y a l'infaillible force avec laquelle poussent
les poils sur la peau des hommes
*Plus rigoureuse que la pesanteur**

Later, much later, I went back to my apartment and decided, as I undressed, that I would leave for the Basque coast as soon as I could get a train. I did not know that I had made this decision but it was there, in the celerity with which I took off my neck-tie and slipped out of my undershirt. Then I lay down in my bed and thought: Patrick and I were in Africa, for a moment, together. In the same uniform. Now we must assimilate the war, each in his way. To live above the level of the world's inconscience was actually to revisit the

*There was nothing for it now but to trust to our luck
Behind us collapsing were the columns of the world
of indifference
But there is the infallible force with which hair keeps
growing on the skin of men
More rigorous than weight

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war, and the camps, at every instant. But after such knowledge, I thought, closing my eyes wearily, what forgiveness? The sanction Rousset keeps seeking, for certain types of behavior, and which the Communists find in an indefinitely distant and treacherous future—is not the future the last refuge of the scoundrel?—can only be found by perverting our conception of man himself. That this conception is historically determined is interesting, but in the end *cela ne tire pas à conséquence.* We live in our history, not above it, and we finally choose between drinking our armagnac or throwing it into someone's face.

I put out the light and longed for sleep. Literature and love and scholarship and talk were indeed only games, but they were the games that man was made to play. How else should we constantly raise these questions, with what other sustenance relive the camps? The bullfight was also a game. . . . And finally, I fell asleep, feeling abominably good. At that hour, and after all those drinks, it was easy to believe, in the words of Patrick's poem, that "we shall raise unsurmountable barricades around the places possessed by love."

H. J. KAPLAN

Los Dragones (Biarritz) July 29, 1947

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The Lesson

MAX WISEMAN

"Did you find the dollar and a half?" she asked.

His mother was sitting across the room from him, removing her stockings. She had just come from the store.

"What dollar and a half?"

"What dollar and a half!" She looked up with a sudden, sharp sorrow in her eyes. "I put a dollar and a half in your bag yesterday, I wanted you to have a good supper."

"Well for *that*," he said, "I'm not going to eat supper here tonight."

"Because I put a dollar and a half in your bag?"

"Because you put it in the bag without my asking. All you did, Ma, was to throw away a dollar and a half."

"Throw away? I put it in the bag with your socks; I put it in a special envelope in the bag!"

"I took out the socks and threw away the bag without looking."

"But how could you! I only put coins in, to make it heavy; didn't you feel it? How could you throw it away?" Her face was twisted because of what he had told her.

He hadn't even opened the bag. It had been on the tip of his tongue to tell her that it was safe. The money meant almost three hours of standing behind the counter in the huge department store and saying to all manner of people, "Yes sir, can I help you?"

But it had gone too far; it was a great amorphous mass; a limitless sea that was drowning him.

"Oh you're lost—you're a lost sheep! To throw away a bag without looking!"

He rose. "I've told you again and again that I don't want you to force money on me when I don't ask for it. I want there to be some meaning in my words. I'm not staying for supper tonight. I'm going back to my room. All that you have done is to throw away a dollar and a half and send me away from supper."

"If you don't stay for supper," she said, looking passionately into his eyes, "you'll never set foot in this house again!"

"I mean what I say; can't you get that through your head? I'm

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doing this as a lesson." He put on his jacket. She still thought that he was bluffing. He had threatened thus many times and always he had given in to her deep-suffering tears and screams.

"Stay here," she said, sensing suddenly that he really intended leaving. "Take off your jacket. I only wanted you to eat. I can spare the extra money—what do you eat on?"

"This time it sticks. This is a lesson. It means that you've got to stop running around with money in your hands, pushing it into mine; you mustn't give without my asking. I would ask. I was going to ask on Wednesday. You force it and force it—as if I were a child; can't you understand that I *mean* what I say? You've got to believe, Mama, that I will be strong. I'll be here for supper in two days, but if you try any of that business with the money again I'm not coming back." He walked to the door and opened it. She ran after him.

"I'll yell in the hall," she said, seizing him by the arm. "I'll yell in the hall if you walk out now. I will come to your room tonight and make a scene."

"So what if you make a scene? I'm over age."

She pulled him back toward the house. He wrenched free and started down the stairs.

"Joseph," she yelled into the hall, "come back, or I will go down to your room tonight!"

He came back into the house and she closed the door behind him. "Ma, you're just making it worse. I'm not starving—I still have some money—and if I were so desperately hungry I'd pick up any job. I just want a chance to get one where I can respect myself."

"You're starving," she breathed in a low, husky voice, staring into his eyes. "Look at your face, you're starving." Her voice was compassionate and pleading. Her face was flushed, tragically and tenderly drawn. He had to turn his head away.

"I'm not starving, Mama. Why can't it be an intelligent thing? When I need money I'll ask you. Rely on me. I'm a man and I'm strong. Why do you degrade me by these childish methods? You'd make a hypocrite of me. The words have no meaning for you. I argue with you and say 'No, Ma, I don't want any money,' and then you stick some in my pocket or in my bag and I've taken it anyway; it's not clean. There is no dignity—"

"Dig-*nity!*" With contempt and despair she almost sobbed the word. "Stop it! Stop that word!" Her face was tired and sweating. She barred the way to the door. "Dignity with your mother? Not with your mother? Not with your mother!"

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"God damn you!" he said. He turned and walked back toward the kitchen. "I'll give you ten minutes to let me out of here. If you don't I won't come back here at all."

Her eyes widened. "I won't let you come back if you leave now."

Then she again looked into his eyes, and she shook her head wearily. "Stay—stay: look at all this food!" She grabbed a basket of strawberries that she had bought for him on her way home. She held it up to him to tempt him. "Look at this—and you're starving—why shouldn't you eat?"

"Oh Mama—you don't understand."

He took out his wallet. "See, I have three dollars here. That's enough for meals for the next two days. I'll come for supper on Wednesday and I'll ask you for five dollars to finish out the week. I'll get a job tomorrow and I'll get paid on Friday."

"Hero! Hero! A martyr! What can you do with three dollars?"

"Now this? Let me get out and I'll come back in two days when perhaps you've learned a lesson."

"No!" she shouted and she seized a knife from the table. "You'll stay here!" She stood before the door with the knife in her hand.

"Don't you leave me any pride?"

"Pride," she hissed. "You have no money, you're starving!" It was not true, but she was staring at his neat, clean suit and his proud face. The woman with the fending arms of a mother saw his pride before life very clearly and it only hurt her more; the woman felt: what are pride and dignity without power?

"You exaggerate. I eat well. I can take care of myself."

"Take care of yourself! I had to help you pay for that suit! Stubborn! Stubborn! Why won't you stay for dinner? Why can't I give you money? That's your sickness—you're stubborn! You'll kill somebody. I know you will, and then you'll die alone in your room; you'll starve in the middle of the city and no one will know. They'll break down the door and find you in your room. You'll go picking garbage cans on the East Side, your fingers yellow from nicotine and shaking! I dreamed it, I dreamed it!"

There were tears in his eyes, and never had he felt so close to her as now. Yet it was atavistic and there was the dark, terrible loneliness and fear that only she could make him feel with her deep-suffering images. He felt his strength going from him; her fearful passion was like a nightmare.

"Ma—I'm going now. Put down that knife! Are you really mad? I'm a man!"

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"A man with your mother?" she asked sadly, contemptuously, bitterly, tenderly.

"No, no, what are you doing?" She dropped the knife and caught at him as he moved past her. She charged at him. Her large, flabby, tired, sweating body was gripping him and her face looked insane. Her face was contorted with suffering and her eyes bulged. "Oh, what are you doing to me?" she asked weakly. "You've made me sick—stop this. All right, it's a lesson—let the lesson begin and end now—and then eat—I'll never do it again—but stay and eat—stay and eat!" And all of it had become that meal; the meal was everything; the meal was her strength and her protection of him. The meal was her love and her bounty for her proud son who was so good to look at with his dignity but had no strength or power.

He pushed at her and started down the stairs. She held him and yelled loudly into the hall: "Stop, Joseph! If you go I shall come down." But he was back in the house again. He had a newspaper rolled into a stiff club in his hand. "Mama—Mama," he said, sobbing, "what are you going to make me do to you?

"Stay, Joseph—stay—please!" Her voice was tired and crying. "Never again—but stay! Why are you so stubborn?" She was holding his arms. Her heavy, sweating arms, with the lumpy flesh hanging thickly above the elbows, were smothering him.

He smashed the paper against her head. "Mama—Mama—what are you making me do to you? What are you making me do to you?" He swung again and again. "Mama, you selfish bitch!" he sobbed.

"You've murdered me," she cried. "You've murdered me and night and day I worry for you."

"That's it! Why must you be tortured for me? I'm happy," he lied, "and I like the life I lead. Only your suffering makes me unhappy."

"So stay, Joseph," she pleaded, "stay!" She was holding her head, and as she spoke she moved to the bathroom sink and dipped her handkerchief in water and put the wet cloth over her forehead.

He loved her hands that had worked for him. He loved her face; her now clumsy feet that foolishly stood there ready to leap for the door. He loved her for the few extra dollars that she tried to give him.

And he found himself shaking with repulsion at her physical nearness. He could not bear her hands upon him. He felt that her flesh was ugly. Tenderly and bitterly he looked into her face.

"Mama, what have you made me do? Let us forget this terrible day. But I must go, or there will be no change."

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She sobbed brokenly and held him. He hit her again and again on the head. She tried to shield herself, now like a hunted, timid animal, as she crouched against the wall with her hands over her.

"Mamma, what are you making me do?" He hit her until the paper was in shreds and was loose and fluttering in his hand.

But she rose, and crying, seized him as he left off beating her. She hit him with her hands to keep him from going.

He pushed her against the wall, the image of her bent head, shielded against his blows, graven on his mind. He threw the paper at her and ran to the door.

"I'll yell in the hall," she sobbed; "I'll yell in the hall and tonight I will come down to your room."

As he ran from the house, he cried freely, not noticing the passers-by.

Later he would see the money in his room. At that moment he felt that he would have died for her.

He hurried faster and faster, away from the house.

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THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM: V

The Socialist Imperative

VICTOR SERGE

PARTISAN REVIEW's symposium on the Future of Socialism compels us to a rigorous examination of conscience—necessary after the experience of recent years. A deep-rooted natural aggressiveness inclines us to condemn the vanquished together with the weak. We must recognize that after twenty years of setbacks, socialism today—although still sustained by the European masses—faces an alarming situation. But we must be objective too; these defeats and this weakness are part of the wreck of all the ideologies at a great century's end. Is conservatism, founded on the belief in the future of capitalism, any better off? Does liberalism, economic and political, continue as a vital force? Doesn't Christianity endure events rather than influence them? Is anarchism more than the emotional idealism of a very weak minority? True, there remains totalitarian Communism. . . . It is enough to consider this context, to realize what the crisis of socialism involves in the way of positive possibilities.

I maintain that, in an age of mass destruction and inhumanity, to think clearly we must distrust our primitive fascination for physical power. *The destruction of values is extremely easy, compared with the creation of values.* A creative intelligence, a city built up by generations, can be destroyed in an instant. But against thought, against the city, this destruction proves nothing. I maintain that, in principle, defeat is not testimony enough against the intelligence; it is sometimes the natural penalty of error or madness, but not always nor inevitably so. Other criteria are necessary to judge the worth and vitality of an ideology, although we must still take into account the profound emotional significance of losses, of defeats, of victories and their apparent causes.

I am surprised that no observer has remarked the most important psychological aspect of the Russian Revolution, although we are still undergoing, and very markedly, the consequences. Until 1917, throughout history, the poor and the exploited had been eternally beaten. For the first time, through the advent of Bolshevism, this

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harsh "natural" law appeared annulled. The masses' feeling of inferiority gave way to confidence, pride, a new optimism. Some roots of Stalinism are still embedded in the soil of these feelings. In a good many minds, there is a frank conflict between truth, facts, and newly acquired faith. If the balance sheet of the Revolution ends in an appalling deficit, they ask, how can there be hope? Many men flinch from this brutally superficial conclusion and prefer blindness, deception, and a totalitarian discipline. Others are poisoned with bitterness. In both cases, rational understanding yields to irrational rationalization. It is no longer a question either of knowledge or a clear conscience. All problems are falsified.

In its development nineteenth-century socialism aimed at being scientific. To be sure, the spirit of justice, militant humanism, idealism concerning the future—these could not be confused with scientific objectivity; in this sense socialism developed more out of the Hebrew prophets' admirable passion than from experimental method. It is no less true, however, that socialist idealism, especially in its Marxist form, wanted to be faithful to the scientific spirit and, by the work of its founders, placed itself in the vanguard of the intellectual life of the century. Therefore it easily outstripped conservative thought. But a movement occupied with forming syndicates, co-operatives, parties struggling for workers' legislation and power, can neither stick to the methodological strictness of *Capital,* nor even follow closely the exceedingly rapid development of ideas between 1847 (the publication of the *Manifesto* by Marx and Engels) and the explosion of nuclear physics. Anthropology, ethnography, comparative sociology, psychology, physics, all enlarged, in the meantime, the knowledge of man and nature beyond the point where socialism was able to follow them. An *advanced* doctrine, it became occasionally a *retrograde* doctrine, a *superseded* doctrine, at least in comparison with the development of the other sciences. Its last great theoretical works, untarnished by practical vulgarization like those of the Russians—the *Finance Capital* of Hilferding, and Rosa Luxembourg's *The Accumulation of Capital*—date from 1910 and 1913 respectively. As early as 1908, in contrast, Lenin, in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism,* formulated a primitive and scholastic philosophy whose feebleness, compared with the works of the age, is startling.

I think it is evident that the Bolshevik leaders, of whose moral uprightness and *fanaticism* for science I had personal knowledge, committed during the Revolution errors of an incalculable gravity because they often proceeded from outworn or insufficient knowledge.

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Their handling of the masses was purely empirical, reduced to an old elementary psychology which caused them to slip into the abyss of facility, that is to say into a rigid doctrinairism, into a faith erected on discord, and before long into a cult, at first semi-involuntary, of the Leader. They conceived dialectical materialism as "a rigorous conception of the world embracing nature and society. . . . " This possession of the complete and absolute Truth made great men dogmatic and mediocre men clerical. The official faith of the "Marxist" State (what had Marx said about it?) condemned free inquiry, the pluralism of hypotheses, individual opinion. This policy was hardest on the man rebellious against official Truth and the authoritarian paralysis of thought. Stalinism finally settled on a home-grown utilitarian kind of investigation, upon statistics deliberately fabricated, upon a uniform literature and upon the persecution of the psychoanalysts. From the Marxism of the scientific spirit to a new obscurantism established on repression and the Right of the State: the cycle was complete. The drama of the old-line Bolsheviks' annihilation by bloody purges was paralleled in intellectual life by the massacre of the Marxist-humanists by parvenus who refused to see the problems and found only the elementary solutions of terror.

This rapid decline of Bolshevism coincided with the weakening of democratic socialism in western Europe. Some of the essential elements of the socialist ideology had, little by little, infiltrated the general mentality. It was impossible to write history any more without assigning the highest importance to economic factors. No longer could any government ignore workers' legislation or social planning. In penetrating the very core of industrial civilization, socialism lost its own identity. This fact would have been in its favor except for a phenomenon which, precisely, its doctrine had not foreseen. The greatest error of Marx and the Marxists had been that of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois optimism. It consisted in predicting a *development of industrial technique simultaneous with the development of human mentality*: technology and "enlightenment," awareness on the part of the working class, the advent of socialist morality. But the techniques of production had a prodigious development, far outstripping that of social organization and that of the average man. Socialism delayed liberating the wage earner from this well-controlled technology; industrial techniques, fallen into the hands of scheming blackguards, fools, and reactionaries, became a mighty instrument of bondage and destruction.

By producing much more with much less manual labor, modern

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technology opened the era of chronic unemployment and tended to substitute the technician for the worker. So began the division and decline of the working class. I see in this last fact the principal cause of the political defeats of European socialism between 1918 and 1940. Millions of declassed, idle workers joined the Nazi movement. Today, still, millions of French workers, who are good fellows and not stupid, vote for the agents of a foreign totalitarianism. In Argentina, "Labor" supports Peron. Schematic conclusion: in these countries the working class was not, and is not the advanced class that it was during the time of Juarez and Bebel. While weakening itself, it has ceased to attract the talented men of the liberal bourgeoisie and has ceased to breed its own talents. In Fascism, Nazism, the Popular Fronts, and, in a somewhat different sense, the Soviet bureaucracy, it is the middle class, considered not long ago by Marxism as doomed to impotence, which has had the political initiative.

The decline of the European ruling classes added too to the general confusion. Annihilated in Russia, misled and panicky in Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, and France, these classes sought safety in the fascist counter-revolution. Stalinism, Fascism, Nazism, meeting the same needs with the same mentalities, resulted in a social transformation characterized by the abolition of individual rights, a planned economy, autocracy, war-hunger. . . . In this respect, our experience is, in great measure, altogether definite.

If, despite these extremely unfavorable conditions, socialism still mobilizes millions of European workers, resists the enemy during the harshest of military occupations, works with intelligence and vigor in Scandinavia and Great Britain, we must see there proof of its vitality and profound legitimacy. The analysis of its deficiencies does not minimize the fundamental fact that it continues the historical drive of Christianity and the bourgeois revolutions *toward the realization of an equitable and rational social organization*. In man's present state, it does not seem conceivable that this ideal, confused as it may sometimes be, can be abandoned. Otherwise humanity would have to accept a belief in despair entirely contradictory to its instincts. Doctrines wear out, deep-rooted needs live and must refurbish their intellectual weapons. In this sense, socialist thought, not at all rebuffed by attack and defeat, has great need of a house-cleaning. During the reconstruction of Europe, the working class seems appointed to recover a good part of its power, in an age in which planning and large measures of social security will be instituted—measures which not long ago were foremost in the socialist program.

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The most difficult task is and will continue to be, to break away from the traditional formulae whose value is only emotional. The myths of the "historic mission of the working class" and the "hegemony of the proletariat" have had their day; the equitable and rational organization of society must become the common cause of the majority in whose rank the workers form only an essential component. No one knows what garments will clothe the social struggles of the future, but experience shows that the seizure of power by civil war is a burden to the victors themselves, and leads to a dictatorship, opposed by its very nature to the fulfillment of socialist humanism. We realize clearly that the principal care of the Spanish socialists—and anarchists—in bringing about the downfall of Franco, is to shed a minimum of blood. Modern techniques of war make victory through the classic type of insurrection difficult to imagine—so long as it risks encountering a determined adversary. No socialist movement, no matter how insignificant, aspires any longer to the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which turned out so badly in Russia. We see, on the contrary, the inseparability of socialism and democracy. The Red Guard, occupying the Russian factories in 1917, was able to get them running with an untrained personnel. We cannot imagine the insurgents of our day making the synthetic chemical plants function.

As for the rest, what can be built on the ruins? The old reformism is no less outmoded than insurrection. Socialist action is by definition, neither exceptionally timid nor exceptionally violent, but it seems that it has to be both transformer and liberator, or else disintegrate.

The socialist movements of Europe are influential; they are indispensable to the democratic reconstruction of the old continent, but they are divided, poor, and wedged between the uneasy animosity of the former ruling classes come to terms with Nazism, the hostility of American capitalism, and Stalinist totalitarianism. This last enemy is undeniably the most dangerous. The Stalinists can gain the respect of the local reactionary forces. They could probably acquire the sympathy of the American masses. Against the incessant totalitarian Communist intervention, provided with funds, cadres, arms, ministers who are secret agents, and secret agents who are ministers, the socialist movements are dangerously unarmed. Despite the concentration camps of the USSR, the Moscow trials, the Hitler-Stalin pact, the tragedies of Poland, the Balkans and Manchuria, the attachment to the glorious legend of the Russian Revolution continues so firmly entrenched that all hypocrisies are accepted and all crimes pardoned. I have shown above the psychological root of this.

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I wish to emphasize the error of those socialist leaders who, though sufficiently informed, did not want either to see themselves clearly or clearly to inform their parties. Undoubtedly they themselves were seduced by this sentimental attachment. When in 1937, released from the prisons of the GPU, I published in Paris and New York *Russia Twenty Years After,* I had a correspondence about this book with the great Austrian Marxist, Otto Bauer, who found me "too pessimistic." Most of the French socialists, bound by the Popular Front to the CP, professed the same opinion. The Spanish socialists and anarchists allowed the Republican Government to prohibit the publication of this book by journals critical of the USSR. Trotsky still upheld the "progressive role" of the latter. More recently, soon after the liberation of France, the French militants estimated that the greatest divergencies between the two "brother parties" had been diminished. This blindness has led them to electoral defeat. At this very moment, some writers of the Independent Labor Party praise the policy of Stalin toward the colonial nationalities of the ancient Czarist Empire. They have not seen the Kazaks die of famine, they have not taken into account the autonomous governments that have been destroyed, they ignore the destiny of the Bashkirs and Tartars during the war. . . . If socialism does not alter this absurd complacence toward the darkest of despotisms, does not proclaim itself as the party of human dignity, obviously it will only be crushed between the reactionaries and the totalitarians.

The antisocialist nature of the Stalinist system is no longer to be doubted. One must have a keen love of paradox to see in the battle of Stalingrad the sequel to the capture of the Winter Palace in 1917, and in the hangman of Lenin's associates, Lenin's successor. A sociological datum that I hold irrefutable deserves more attention: we see at the summit of the social hierarchy of the USSR a minority of about 15 per cent of the population, adults and children, enjoying material privileges. (This estimate was Trotsky's, several other writers', and my own before the war; the numerical importance of the privileged minority has rather decreased during the war.) If on the other hand we admit for the penal labor in the Soviet concentration camps a figure varying between ten and fifteen millions of condemned persons, the percentage of adults reduced to slavery is greater than that of adults enjoying living conditions comparable on the whole to those of the skilled worker in the United States.

The unimaginable inner weakness of Stalinist totalitarianism, demonstrated by these percentages, makes less probable its victory

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on the European continent, and allows us to hope reasonably, in Russia too, for great changes. The peace of the world and the reconstruction of a Europe that will be socialist seem to me to depend on this perspective, which I cannot dwell on here. But were such changes remote or were the USSR inevitably verging on a catastrophic war, the socialist point of view would still not be altered. The defense of mankind is not so strictly conditioned by historical expediency. The blackest moments establish the most categorical imperatives.

The aspirations toward the rational organization of society for the realization of a higher human dignity could never, I believe, either be eliminated or lastingly repressed. They have survived up to now during many agonized times; even engendered and stimulated a difficult progress, born of the uncertain, during the whole course of our civilization. It is pleasing to me to write here the word "progress" at a time when writers whom I respect debate its meaning, as if nothing valuable had been accomplished since the human animal renounced cannibalism. That the atomic bomb is more inhuman, more evil than saturation bombing, I doubt; but that atomic energy can soon become an immense factor in the liberation of the proletariat, I cannot doubt. That a planned economy, founded on poverty and for the purpose of war, will end in a new slavery, I know, because I have seen it; but that the superior forms of production, governed no longer by the profit motive but by intelligence, need liberty as our organism needs oxygen, I can no longer doubt after having observed intimately the crises of Soviet industry. That philosophies of despair are fashionable in a time like ours, does not astonish me. We can well question our own destiny, and from this question draw material for literature. The destiny of the world unfolds with a vitality that outlives individuals and literatures. And for this reason the resolute choice for confidence in intelligence and the human will seems to me the most justified of choices.

(*Translated from the French by George Schloss*)

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On PR, Kafka and the Habits of Critics: A Communication

Sirs,

As someone to whom the existence of PR is an unqualified blessing, may I comment on a couple of bad habits that seem to crop up continually in the best work of your best critics?

As I see it, your function is twofold—to present and elucidate works of art, and to promote a state of mind that has a genuine use for art in the modern world. The refinement of the notion of partisanship, therefore, is bound to be the history of your magazine. In the field of literary and intellectual criticism (as if the two could be separated in fact!) your partialities have broadened and deepened consistently—you have achieved higher and more inclusive levels of disaffection. In an almost miraculous way you have kept yourself free of sectarian bigotry in your editorial policy. The most disgruntled would-be contributor must admit that he is balked by the fallibilities of literary judgment rather than by any lack of good will.

How much this sense of freedom and radical temper in PR has meant to me cannot be overstated, and I consider it a solemn occasion to be able to say as much. As we go into what promises to be at any rate a grim if not catastrophic period, the preservation of an American intellectual community is the highest goal, perhaps, that a magazine can set itself. I don't see how community can be preserved on any level lower than that set by PR. Our universities are not intellectual communities in any real sense. They are groups of virtuosi gathered together largely for self-protection, giving their relatively meaningless solo performances according to certain comfortable conventions. We have had many brilliant analyses of the "Academy" in PR, so it is hardly necessary for me to say more on the subject. Our small college *Reviews* occasionally run PR a close second, but one wonders what might happen if they lacked the example of radical independent *Reviews*. The pretense of editorial impartiality is no more successful on the level of the *Reviews* than on the *Time-Life* level. The Luce papers are partial to all kinds of nationalist arrogance, moral stupidity, and pea-green sophomoric wit; PR is partial to vitality, elegance, honesty, etc., etc.,—there's the difference, and there is no conceivable compromise. No art or craft can afford a democracy of standards—only a democracy of technical means. Perhaps this is all gross platitude, but it is something I wanted to say.

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The academic method of literary criticism which Richard Chase analyzed so well in a *Report from the Academy* tries for complete democracy. Its problem, therefore, is to increase production and diminish meaning to the vanishing point. The best way to increase production is to create the illusion of originality and prestige on a huge scale, and one way to achieve this is the "clue" method of research. In the vast modern accessibility of literature, there are surely enough clues so that each Ph.D. candidate and each professor can have a handful. The "clue" is the device, or "key" that is supposed to crack open the work of a difficult writer—it is a leading abstraction on which one takes out an unwritten copyright. I understand well enough that no literary criticism is possible without leading abstractions; I am only criticizing their special appropriation to create the illusion of an impartial democratic standard of specialization.

The Kafka Problem is perhaps the most blood-chilling example of this mania in recent years. James Burnham, in the March-April, 1947 PR, does noble battle against the book and all it stands for. I am going to be ungracious enough to point out how he is overcome by his efforts and falls into the same habit he is denouncing. He is, after all, a professor himself and can hardly be expected to shake off his classroom mores completely. The professor is a person who, of all other people in the world bar none, finds it hardest to enjoy writing—art—for its own sake. Who can blame him when the spiritual condition of his charges cries out for shock, for the utmost sympathy at the same time? A sense of responsibility is indivisible, and the professor who has it to a high degree is racked, no less than the Church was in its day of intellectual leadership, by a dual allegiance to souls and to art. The academicians who, in an old PR symposium on The Future of American Writing, praised the academic life because it kept them close to the classics were hardly being candid. They are no less near to the terrible darkness and possessiveness in the mind of the young American animal. Nothing can minimize the absolute claim made upon them by this light-seeking, light-fearing creature. No, envy and blame must be kept out of the question when we are criticizing the sins of our best academic criticism. It is essentially as thankless a business in its way as hand-to-mouth Bohemia.

Professor Burnham, in other words, has his clue to Kafka. Let's work backward through the article from the clue, which is Manichaeism. Earlier in the essay Burnham writes, "At the allegorical level, it seems to me an error to try to reach a single, consistent, and final interpretation of Kafka's meaning." And yet, by scrutiny of his writing alone, Burnham has come to the conclusion that Kafka held a perfectly explicit coherent theological doctrine known as Manichaeism, a doctrine that caused Augustine a great deal of spiritual suffering. We are told that "As a Manichaean, Kafka's aim must be to create an art that is

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purely spiritual in which matter is altogether eliminated." Burnham must be praised for not dragging the term "mysticism" into the discussion, a word that is currently reeling under as great a load of arbitrarily discarded meanings as the word "democracy." Nevertheless he ends up by accusing Kafka of a mystic doctrine of pure spirit, known as "gnosticism" in Christian times, elements of which appear even in Paul, although under control of prophetic and Christian ideas. You can become a mystic for one of two reasons, out of hatred for the world or out of a natural spiritual avocation—for love of pure spirit, in other words.

Burnham sets himself the task of finding either of these two things in Kafka, and I do not think he has succeeded or even begun to succeed.

First, the evidence for Kafka's hatred of life. Burnham writes, "This means then, that Kafka makes no attempt to imitate, or display, the material, the natural world. . . . "All he means is that Kafka has abandoned the naturalistic attempt to present the fullness of life in its continuum. Kafka's interest is in precisely "the connective tissue" that Burnham claims he dissolves. The naturalist novelists thought of the connective tissue as the sequence of natural contingencies. Since they had an atomistic and roughly Lockean view of human mind, corresponding to the collapse of intellectual disciplines in the nineteenth century, they conceived of the continuum as outside of mind. James was educated in this tradition and we find strong evidence of the Flaubert-Turgenev continuous-description method in an early novel like *The Bostonians*. Later in his life, James more and more scrapped this ideal in favor of a moral crux, but never scrapped it to any extent comparable to Kafka. Kafka saw the continuum entirely in mind and the "natural" sequence of his stories is the sequence of the mind's attempts to make a rationally coherent scheme of existence. That is why we are finding today, as Burnham writes, that " . . . the condition of Kafka's hero is not in the least fantastic or peculiar. It is exactly and literally the human condition." That is, it is the condition of the rationalist, and the very irrationality of it, the perpetual sensation of falling away, is due to the heat of Kafka's rational ideals combined with his intellectual honesty. I am waiting for some word on Kafka from the Thomist critics, Winters and Maritain, because he is closest to them in his spirit and most damaging to them in his conclusions.

Since only so much of the material world as is essential to locate a spiritual reality is necessary to Kafka's art, that is all he gives us. But he does emphatically give us that much. He does describe faces, textures, "nature," character, etc., very minutely when that is necessary. We learn about Josephine's size, color, mannerisms, strength of voice, the quality of her talent, and so on. Kafka's object not being to tell a "story" about Josephine, to trace a phase of her development, that is,

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within a given set of intellectual assumptions, but rather to locate Josephine fully in space and time and then understand her in the whole range of intellectual associations that her existence involves, the naturalistic needs of the story are slight. It is foolish to suppose, however, that Kafka does not respect the naturalistic impulse or has not learned from it. That Burnham admits Kafka's "sudden pulses of tenderness" as well as wit and gaiety is an admission that he recognizes Kafka's loyalty to the observed fact. Can one "hate life" and have the marvelous sense of humor evident in the Josephine story? I think not. That Kafka considered life a bad bargain is something else again.

Burnham writes that "The literal meaning in Kafka is not an adequate starting point; it is not complete or sufficient in its own terms." If the literal meaning of Kafka's stories is not "sufficient," then the stories themselves are not "sufficient," because all their meaning has been translated into literal terms. There is no difference between Dante's and Kafka's method, only a difference in doctrine, in conclusions from experience. Allegory is allegory, and must stand on its own feet. The stories actually do "suffice" quite well as stories, just as such imitations as Isaac Rosenfeld's *The Brigadier* suffice. Kafka may be interested in how the actual world embodies the abstractions of mind, but he is a novelist first. Again, Burnham backs me up by writing, "We wrong Kafka by turning him into a philosopher or theologian or social scientist." Why then claim that his stories are not "sufficient" on their own grounds when all one means is that they are suggestive, as indeed all good fiction must be in various degrees?

We are not getting any closer to Manichaeism, no matter how we approach. The anxiety which Burnham claims to be the dominant note in Kafka is an existential virtue. The first people to become doctrinally aware of themselves as existents were the first to claim anxiety as a virtue. It implies an inseparable union of spirit and matter—perhaps as far from the Manichaean heresy as any doctrine could possibly be.

As Burnham admits, Kafka had normal animal appetites. He was fond of athletics and good at them; he was not averse to the pleasures of the table or good company. He had to postpone and forego marriage for a complex of difficulties, but did not forego the company of women. There seem to be no signs of spiritual vocation in Kafka. He was simply a rare spirit, which is not the same thing. His mind was legal, logical, philosophical, and occasionally lyrical, as any sensitive reader of such a story as *Josephine* will know. An extraordinary spate of nonsense about his "supersonic" explorations will be found in the recent Luce press and Sunday supplements.

The further evidence for Kafka's Manichaeism adduced by Burnham is also unconvincing. He bases Kafka's alleged loathing of sex on the encounter in *The Castle,* forgetting the two quite different episodes

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in *The Trial* with Fräulein Bürstner and Leni, both of which are enjoyed and warmly presented. If it is the somewhat factitious warmth of the erotic dream and comes under the rubric of sin, that is not to say that Kafka "loathed" it. There is in Kafka, as in Mann, a strain of bourgeois nostalgia. He never lost his respect for the virtues of "normalcy" and speaks in his 1917 diary of "the joy of living the life of the normal healthy man." This is surely not the Manichaean longing for the fire-purification, nor for the paradoxical depths. "I actually envy all marital happiness in its infinitely varied forms." Is this the voice of Augustine?

There are, of course, enough traces of the light-dark, good-evil dualism in Kafka to make Burnham's point sound reasonable. The trouble with using a term out of a remote era in Christian history is the amount of quite new and different data involved. We cannot blink the fact that Kafka had no greater an involvement with spirit than Mann, that his attitude toward art is in fact almost identical with Mann's. It is the ambivalence of the bourgeois who thinks he has lost his nerve and is thrown into a world of philosophical and theological speculation alien to his nature. Kafka wanted to live as his century lived. The following sentence from his diaries of 1921 should be conclusive evidence. "He who does not master life while alive must use one hand somehow to ward off his despair over his fate—that is done very imperfectly—but with his other hand he may record what he sees beneath the wreckage. . . . "

Kafka's problem in his personal life was not the polarity of matter and spirit but, if it must be labeled by a venerable medieval term, the sin of *acedia*—"weariness, boredom, regret"—as he writes in the diaries. "Only very rarely have I put behind me this borderland between solitude and community." When he did put this state behind him momentarily, it was to return to the "normal" pleasures. In 1922 he writes, "The infinite, deep, warm, liberating joy of sitting near the crib of one's child, facing its mother."

The unhappiness of Kafka is a very much more deep and complex question than any simple set of traditional dualities, a situation more close to our lives than we want to admit. It is the fear of malfunction in an age when there is almost nothing to support the disintegrating individual. It is the situation of the writer who is honest enough to face that disintegration in all its solitary horror and who, because he has hoped so much, himself aids the disintegration. The writer is literally driven into intellectual and spiritual disciplines that are alien to him. "Without ancestors, without marriage, without progeny, with an unbridled desire for ancestors, marriage, and progeny." This intimate anguish of his diaries reveals what his preoccupations were. One might be justified in seeing him as the type of the stripped, traditionless man,

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redeemed in his own eyes only by the grace of his artistic talent, little as that could do to help him. I say this in all reverence because I consider him the most powerful and absorbing writer of fiction since James.

R. W. FLINT

THE DOOR AND THE WINDOW

My love, you are timely come, let me lie by your heart.
For waking in the dark this morning, I woke to that mystery,
Which we can all wake to, at some dark time or another:
Waking to find the room not as I thought it was,
But the window further away, and the door in another direction.

This was not home, and you were far away,
And I woke sick, and held by another passion,
In the icy grip of a dead, tormenting flame,
Consumed by the night, watched by the door and the window,
On a bed of stone, waiting for the day to bring you.

The window is sunlit now, the spring day sparkles beyond it,
The door has opened: and can you, at last beside me,
Drive under the day that frozen and faithless darkness,
With its unseen torments flickering, which neither
The dearest look nor the longest kiss assuages?

HENRY REED

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Books

THE SUFFERINGS AND GREATNESS OF SELF-LOVE

"SOMETIMES I HAVE days," Tonio Kröger says, and Mann has quoted the words of himself, "when I would rather state things in general terms than go on telling stories." It is this inner compulsion to escape from fable to statement that motivates these essays.* They are not essays in literary criticism, though most of them deal with creative writers; in general, they regard the writer as the Hero, the work of art as an event, biographical or historical, both as occasions for formulating views that have threatened the structure, music, or even the fate of one of Mann's creative works. The novels, stories, and essays (the "political" ones in *Order of the Day* as well) cohere in an ultimate composition of which they are the mere forms, the artist's composition of himself.

Goethe is for Mann the exemplar of the self-composed life and there is not one of these essays in which his name is not invoked, for the *subject*, as well as the end, of these pieces is that process by which the writer (the compound of *Dichter* and *Schriftsteller* for which German has no word) creates out of himself the Man-God.

Nobility of the Spirit, Mann calls this collection in the German edition, *Sixteen Essays on Humanity*, but it is easy to misunderstand what he means by "humanity." It would be more illuminating to call these *Sixteen Essays on Self-love*. The romance between a man and himself, born with the Renaissance and culminating in idolatrous excess in the nineteenth century, seems, perhaps, a little alien to us. Self-distrust, if not humility, is the order of our day; our view of ourselves is bathetic: "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be. . . . " But for Mann there is a pathos of self-adulation; "darling" is his chosen epithet for himself, and, in the end, we are charmed despite ourselves by the irony and variety, the tenderness of his self-regard. All the world loves a lover.

But we must pass first the style, often turgid, self-indulgent, demanding. We must allow Mann to repeat shamelessly his favorite anecdotes, to fondle every insight to weariness, to tell us he likes grapefruit, dislikes tomato juice. In return, we will get a sort of sentimental history of the nineteenth century; the Beatrice and Dante of the period just past turns out to be not Faust and Margaret, not Tristan and Isolde—but the Artist and Himself, Mann and Mann, or to use his own modest screen, Mann and Goethe.

*ESSAYS OF THREE DECADES. *By Thomas Mann.* *Knopf.* $4.00.

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Modesty, Mann remarks, is a lovely word, and we must know where to look for it in him. If one aspect of the "lived myth," the "life of reanimation" is pride, another is the modesty of playfulness, the smile. In "Freud and the Future" Mann talks of his own *imitatio* Goethe, "the childish identification with a father image elected out of profound affinity," the mythical point of view become subjective—and a little ironic. It is in the four essays on Goethe, then, that we should expect Mann's essential apologia.

In Goethe, we are told, mastery in art and the human quality of egoism are seen for the first time as inseparable; he is the type of "the great man in poet's form," the Artist as Hero. Conscious of his own role, he names the spring of his own being; *"Ehrfurcht vor sich selbst,"* Goethe calls that passion which motivates all autobiography (for Mann art is nothing else), and makes the romantic, spoilt-darling demand on the world: to be loved, to be loved!

But the passionate sense of the self does not stop at art, indeed, destroys its integrity; more than a creator, the writer must become a "Prince of Life," the highest representative of culture and humanity. There is the word at last which Mann inscribed on his title page.

The love of the ego becomes, symbolically, the love of humanity; the lonely debate of the narcissist is seen as the classroom lecture, the public speech. For the eminent man is, mythically, all mankind; the history of the relationship with himself is everyone's paradigm; subjectively, he makes the leap in passion from his beloved "I" to the great Thou of the world.

Notice, it is the "*great* Thou" of abstraction, not man, but mankind. The writer has not turned to humanity via the small "thou" of his neighbor, and, in the end (as Mann sees in Tolstoy, his other Goethe), he continues to love concretely, *really,* only himself. We are not convinced by Mann's self-assurance that there is "more grace" in such a plight than in sainthood.

The idolatry goes even further; for not humanity alone, but *divinity* inheres in the great writer. He is godlike, his home a shrine, his evocation a way to salvation. Here, I think, is a clue to the equivocal love of death that binds Mann and Wagner in a common guilt: the self is a dying god, a god of death. To have death in the heart is not only, as Mann explains in the essay on Platen, the function of an "unsatisfying" egoism, egoism without public acclaim, but of the whole impulse to deify the ego.

The study of Platen, taken together with the splendid intuition of "Death in Venice," illuminates the terrible linking of narcissism, homosexuality, and death, and evokes with apparent impertinence the name of Don Quixote, on which in another context the book closes. Don Quixote is, after all, to the point, the delightful self-betrayal the artist

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cannot escape: the Olympian image of Goethe, the Prince of Life, is revealed in the dream of the last pages as the Knight of Lions, the Warrior of the doleful countenance, the eternal glory of self-deceit.

LESLIE A. FIEDLER

THROUGH THE LENS DARKLY

FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER: A PSYCHOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE GERMAN FILM. *By Siegfried Kracauer. Princeton University Press.* $5.00.

AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT from the author's previous writings on films—one of which, "Propaganda and the Nazi War Film," is reprinted here as an appendix—there are many fine perceptions in this elaborate study of the 1918-1933 German film. Mr. Kracauer, who was an editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* from 1920 to 1933, knows his subject intimately; he saw most of the films when they originally appeared, and he has covered the literature thoroughly. Nevertheless, the book is satisfactory neither as history nor as sociological interpretation. It is a "thesis book" of the most crude and naïve kind, using special pleading and far-fetched interpretations to wrench the data into a simplistic pattern.

"Through an analysis of the German films," writes Mr. Kracauer, "deep psychological dispositions predominant in Germany can be exposed"; these dispositions he sees as, without exception, leading away from democracy and toward authoritarianism; in a word, he looks for (and finds) in the German films only one thing: hidden, advance indications of a fascist mentality on the part of the German people. That such indications did exist is obvious. But this modest truth the author inflates beyond all proportion: his method is, in fact, totalitarian itself, since reality is permitted only one direction, all those films which attacked authoritarian ideas—and there were many—being elaborately explained away as only superficially antifascist; their "real," "deep," "inner" meaning, one gathers, was profascist.

The devices by which this is accomplished are varied and wonderful. Films showing individual rebellion—such as *Maedchen in Uniform*—are criticized because "their sole concern was the individual" and because "they ignored the suffering masses and . . . shunned any solution that recalled humanization, progress, and democracy" (whatever those last three terms may mean—they are nowhere defined). It is admitted that *Emil and the Detective* is democratic in spirit, but the objection is raised that "this spirit evades definition; instead of crystallizing in some tangible conviction, it remains a mood. . . . Since this mood is rather indistinct—it also results from the tender concern with politically ambiguous childhood events—the conclusion that the democratic attitudes

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behind this film lack vitality is unavoidable." The author demands of the German film-makers—why not of Hollywood too?—that they define democracy in celluloid, on pain of being considered profascist. Confronted by Pabst's *Westfront 1918,* "an outright pacifist document," he complains it is not Marxist enough: "Its fundamental weakness consists in not transgressing the limits of pacifism itself. The film tends to demonstrate that war is intrinsically monstrous and senseless; but this indictment of war is not supported by the slightest hint of its causes." When Pabst goes on to make *Kameradschaft,* which *does* treat the causes of war from a socialist point of view, we learn: "That the socialist pacifism of *Kameradschaft* was better founded than the humanitarian pacifism of *Westfront 1918* does not justify the assumption that it was more substantial. Under the Republic, the German socialists, especially the Social Democrats, proved increasingly unable to grasp the significance of what happened around them." Pabst could easily have avoided such criticisms by leading a successful socialist revolution.

Nor is Mr. Kracauer's simplism only political. The interpretation of an art work by "depth psychology" is a delicate business, or should be. This approach considers an art as the psychoanalyst considers a dream: as a symbol concealing a hidden meaning, i.e., as something to be understood in other than its own terms. New insights are possible with such an approach, but only if the observer remembers that an art work also has a conscious, surface meaning and that, unlike a dream, this meaning is the important one.

Thus we read, apropos the vogue of mountaineering films: "The idolatry of glaciers and rocks was symptomatic of an antirationalism on which the Nazis could capitalize." It is as impossible to disprove this statement as to prove it; but the fact that rocks and glaciers look well on the screen might have also had something to do with their use in German, as in our own, films. Indeed, the author himself says as much a page earlier: "Whoever saw them will remember the glittering white of glaciers against a sky dark in contrast, the magnificent play of clouds forming mountains above mountains" etc. It is generally a mistake to seek a complex explanation when a simpler one is adequate; Mr. Kracauer's practice is just the reverse. He notes, apropos a merry-go-round that is used thematically in the fair sequences of *Caligari*: "The circle here becomes a symbol of chaos. While freedom resembles a river, chaos resembles a whirlpool. Forgetful of self, one may plunge into chaos; one cannot move on in it." (Reactionary whirlpools, progressive rivers—has the pathetic fallacy been carried to more absurd lengths?) And a circular dance floor in a night club, in a later film, draws this solemn comment: "Here, as in the case of *Caligari,* the circle denotes a state of chaos." That a merry-go-round is a cinematically interesting way to sum up a fair, or that night-club floors are usually

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circular to save space—these commonplaces are too humdrum for the depth psychologist.

A prime error in method—one which had to be made in order to carry out the black-and-white contrast between a demonically possessed Germany and an undefined and unanalyzed norm of Democracy and Progress—is the lack of comparison of the German films with those of other nations, especially the United States. The number of German films which seriously dealt with the political and social problems of their time —and almost always from an anti-authoritarian point of view—was extraordinarily large; even such "entertainment" films as *The Beggars' Opera* or *The Captain of Kopenick* were also bitter and explicit social criticisms. Hollywood, obviously, has little comparable to offer. Some of these films are treated under the contemptuous chapter-heading: "Timid Heresies"; but Hollywood commits no heresies at all, timid or otherwise. The author is very severe about the political "escapism" of German films—he even censures certain abstract films as marking "an utter withdrawal from the world"—and reads all kinds of sinister foreshadowings in gangster movies like *Dr. Mabuse.* But escapism and brutal crime have always been Hollywood's stock in trade. To admit this, however, would destroy Mr. Kracauer's main thesis, which is that the German "collective soul" was committed to fascism long before 1933 and that all German films, without exception, reveal this soul-sickness. For if the comparison with Hollywood were made, the question would arise why fascism has not long ago arisen here. And this in turn would suggest certain awkward suspicions about that Democracy and Progress he mentions so frequently, and so vaguely.

In short, it is as impossible to understand the German film when it is considered, as here, by itself, as it is to understand Hitlerism in terms of the situation inside Germany alone. The frame of reference is simply too narrow, so that phenomena appear to be unique and distinctive which actually are part of a much broader process. The profundity of the author's comprehension of this broader process is indicated by his statement: "I believe that studies of this kind may help in the planning of films . . . which will effectively implement the cultural aims of the United Nations."

DWIGHT MACDONALD

AUDEN AND STEVENS

THE AGE OF ANXIETY. *By W. H. Auden. Random House.* $2.50.
TRANSPORT TO SUMMER. *By Wallace Stevens. Knopf.* $2.50.

THE SCHEME of Auden's new long poem is clear enough and rich in possibility. Four human beings meet in a Third Avenue bar, drink, discuss the seven ages of existence, get drunk, and become or discuss states of prehistoric happiness, go to the apartment of Rosetta, the one

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girl among them, and continue to drink until one of the men starts to make love to Rosetta just before he passes out. The poem concludes with a long passage of vague affirmation, an affirmation of Christianity which is no more convincing than Auden's rejection of Christianity twelve years back when, for example, he spoke of cathedrals as "luxury liners for the self-absorbed." Within this framework, which might be very dramatic, Auden inserts juke-box lyrics, parodies of the radio, and exercises in the seven or eight poetic styles of his career.

What this work comes to, at least for me (and perhaps I should say that no one else has spoken of it with anything but admiration), is the most self-indulgent book Auden has written. It is far more self-indulgent than *The Orators*. Here the seeming order is merely contrived and allows for all kinds of gratuitous excursions. In *The Orators* the seeming disorder was produced by the subliminal character of the subject matter, by the fact that very important unconscious material broke through to consciousness. It can be said that the most unique quality of modern literature is the eruption of the unconscious within areas of the conscious mind, which is not quite able to understand and control all that has forced its way up. It is significant that Auden now regards *The Orators* as a failure while in writing *The Age of Anxiety* he strives to renew communication with the subject matter which made *The Orators* one of his most exciting books.

In this new work, Auden's technical skill, which is as various as any poet's, and his easy virtuosity, which is at times too easy, show in full strength. The use of alliteration here is a beautiful addition to his enormous bag of tricks. But the result is a plethora of effects which for the most part get in each other's way. The possibility of a narrative line is muffed throughout. And the eloquent dialectic inherent in the use of dialogue comes to almost nothing because each character often speaks as if he had not heard what the previous character just said. The Third Avenue bar does not really exist in the poem, despite the juke box. There is no real anxiety in the poem, but merely the discussion of anxiety. And the characterization of the four persons is blurred or blotted out again and again when each one makes speeches which cannot be said to be out of character because they have nothing to do with character at all. Just before the end of the poem, for example, Rosetta suddenly turns out to be Jewish for the sake of a speech about the nature and the destiny of Jews; nothing whatever in Rosetta's previous remarks has prepared the reader for this revelation about Rosetta's origins and her views of them.

The poem as a whole simulates narrative, drama, and philosophical dialogue. In actuality it is hardly more than a suite of expositions, alternately discursive, allegorical, and lyrical, of Auden's thoughts and opinions. Perhaps the cause is Auden's mixed and contradictory inten-

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tions. His chief motive is now didactic. He has become a teacher, father, and prophet; he began as a subversive satirist, dissident son, and *enfant terrible*. He is now trying to write in the didactic mode while at the same time retaining the idiom of his early work, which was most successful when it was a fusion of the ominous, the flip, the colloquial, and the intuitive. In this new work, Auden attempts to use phrases such as "You're not my dish really" in the same kind of context as "His Good ingressant on our gross occasions." The effect on one reader at least can only be compared to hearing that there's going to be a hot time in the old town tonight chortled in an extremely English accent. Perhaps it is possible to write in a style which is at once full of colloquial diction and philosophical terminology (and this work might very well be a stage in Auden's development of such a style); and perhaps it is also possible to be didactic, dialectic, lyrical, dramatic, narrative, philosophical, concrete, and abstract in the same poem. But Auden has not succeeded in doing so. There is nothing wrong with being a didactic poet, if one has a coherent set of ideas which one has lived with for a long time. But Auden is not really a didactic poet, he is something better and more important.

One also senses much that is uncertain and unclear in the ideas of which Auden now writes so fondly. It is as if he were not really sure that they were true, despite the schematism and the capitalized abstractions by means of which he presents them. Whether this be an accurate impression or not, we have from years back a good example of how easy it is to be lucid, eloquent, and utterly wrong. When Auden came to America, his coming was compared to James's and Eliot's departure for England as if it were the same kind of migration and not absolutely different: to go to Europe from America is obviously to go in the opposite direction from going to America from England. There is much to suggest that an insensitivity to this overwhelming difference may explain the quality of Auden's recent work. His genius depends upon England, upon the English scene, upon perceptions and emotions inspired by being English. It is in America that he must become a poetic teacher who versifies doctrines picked up carelessly and uncritically from a dozen heterogeneous and unexamined sources. In America too Auden has taken some of his most beautiful and serious poems and in his collected volume attached to these poems titles which are facetious and silly: "Shut Your Eyes and Open Your Mouth," "Heavy Date," "Such Nice People," "Please Make Yourself At Home," "Do Be Careful," "It's So Dull Here," "Nobody Understands Me." These are representative instances of the kind of tourist slanginess which has infected Auden's style as a whole and which is far from being the same thing as the colloquial actuality which gave his work of ten and fifteen years ago so much emotional force. There is nothing in this new book which comes

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near the prophetic power of such a passage as this, from his first book:

You whom I gladly walk with, touch,
Or wait for as one certain of good,
We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
The heel on the finishing blade of grass,
The self-confidence of the falling root,
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang; would leave them
In sullen valley where is made no friend,
The old gang to be forgotten in the spring,
The hard bitch and the riding-master,
Stiff underground; deep in clear lake
The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there.

II

Transport to Summer continues, extends, and enrichens the themes which dominated Wallace Stevens' previous books. He is writing again of the nature of poetry, of the way in which the imagination struggles with reality, of the necessity and ultimate poverty of ideas face to face with the darkness, variety, and endlessness of reality. To think of this new book and of his work as a whole within the arena or circus tent of modern literature is to come upon a fabulous image: Stevens is like an inspired minister in a small church (the church, however, is within the circus tent) who preaches sermons in celebration and in praise of poetry, reality, and their various relations. His listeners are other poets, but not all other poets. No one else appears to be interested enough to attend, and if anyone else did, he would be perplexed by what Stevens is saying and how he is saying it. For only poets remember that a good book must be conquered like a foreign language, and he who runs cannot read. It is true that there are times when Stevens' tropes are too tangential or peculiar to his own sensibility: he speaks once of "Marianna's Swedish cart," an allusion which can only be fully understood if one has read and remembered a recent poem by Marianne Moore. But this example is extreme. R. P. Blackmur has remarked that Stevens' poems "grow in the mind." At each new reading or new memory of them, one comes upon an astonishing lucidity, while metaphors and references which seem private or opaque become clear, necessary, fresh, and original as a discovery or an invention. The texture of Stevens' poetry is often visual, gay, and verbal in such a way that the reader may easily miss the seriousness and the passion of the attitudes and the emotions which are its substance. The starting point of so many poems is so often poetry itself, poetry as such, that Stevens may often seem

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to be merely the poet who is writing poetry about poetry. But it is as if a man who started to dig a well dug so long and so deeply that he dug his way to China. Stevens seeks out so many of the inexhaustible connections of poetry that he unearths a great deal of the actual world. Which is what one would expect: if you study anything closely enough, you find yourself studying a great many other things, of necessity. As Stevens says in one of his new poems, "Adam in Eden was the father of Descartes." Or, as in the motion of many of his poems, poetry brings one to the imagination which brings one to what is not imagined but actual which brings one to wonder which is which or Descartes, and whether Adam was as metaphysical and critical as Descartes, and in the end the poet has written a new poem in which the actual world becomes new again. For example:

MEN MADE OUT OF WORDS

What should we be without the sexual myth,
The human revery or poem of death?

Castratos of moon-mash—Life consists
Of propositions about life. The human

Revery is a solitude in which
We compose these propositions, torn by dreams,

And by the fear that defeats and dreams are one,
By the terrible incantations of defeats.

The whole race is a poet that writes down
The eccentric propositions of its fate.

and for one more example, a more eloquent one:

The poem refreshes life so that we share,
For a moment, the first idea. . . . It satisfies
Belief in an immaculate beginning

And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,
To an immaculate end. We move between these points
From that ever-early candor to its late plural

And the candor of them is the strong exhilaration
Of what we feel from what we think, of thought
Beating in the heart, as if blood newly came,

An elixir, an excitation, a pure power.
The poem, through candor, brings back a power again
That gives a candid kind to everything.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

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FICTION CHRONICLE

THE AGE OF REASON. *By Jean-Paul Sartre. Translated by Eric Sutton. Knopf.* $3.00.
THE COLLECTED TALES OF E. M. FORSTER. *Knopf.* $2.75.
PRINCE OF DARKNESS. *By J. F. Powers. Doubleday.* $2.75.

CERTAINLY NO ONE except the most piously reticent or shamelessly envious could resent the appearance from time to time of those vigorous intellectual and artistic personalities who manage to impress their image upon their own decade, or even their own year. No matter what their final value may be, these people, by arousing gossip and controversy, disturbing Philistines and exhilarating college students, help to keep alive the interest in art and to remind the world of the excitement of the intellectual life. Sartre, as one of the most energetic "personalities" of the moment, gives a certain richness to the whole possibility of cutting a figure; he is everywhere and everything, a philosopher, journalist, novelist, playwright—the very opposite of Gertrude Stein's warning that "it takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing. . . . " To some extent his versatility, a quality of which Americans have always been unreasonably suspicious and which Sartre has in many ways dignified, and his energy make Sartre invulnerable: if you don't like him as a philosopher you remember that he's a man of letters, and if you don't like him as a writer you consider his merits as a philosopher, and if you don't like him as either you must admit that, in these sullen days, he's a bright and buoyant human being whose intellectual vitality alone is enough to make him one of the most important living writers.

To consider one side of him, his novels and plays, Sartre is, from the slight and inconclusive evidence of the work translated in this country, an awkward successor to the older avant-garde tragic figures who were primarily concerned with defending, through their work and the force of their personalities, the very possibility of art itself, and whose strength and foolishness came from the terrible agony of the creative life. Undoubtedly none of our old gods would have written a novel like *The Age of Reason,* the first volume of a trilogy, and the weakest piece of Sartre's writing, in any form, to be translated here.

The most interesting thing about *The Age of Reason* is its mediocrity, the fact that it is no better and no worse than it is. It just barely gets by as an ordinary, naturalistic novel with a few good moments and, surprisingly enough, no special quality; but an ordinary, naturalistic novel is exactly the sort of project that puts the greatest strain upon Sartre's talents. *No Exit* and *The Flies,* for all their limitations, at least gave him a chance to use his brilliance in argument and did not too painfully

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illustrate his determined superficiality about character. Because it uses mythological characters whom we may allow to act like "forces" rather than people, *The Flies* is the more successful as a work of art, but unfortunately too much of its power depends upon its allegorical similarity to the German occupation of Paris for the play to have lasting value. *No Exit* is much more interesting, but it uses people snatched from the real world, the world we know, and immediately we resent Sartre's wanton creation of pure "types." The faults of *No Exit* are increased in *The Age of Reason* and are extremely crucial because in this latter work Sartre hasn't even got the help of a first-rate situation. The book is a mistake, the kind often made by writers whose equipment is specialized, but nevertheless valid when they have the good fortune to find just the right material.

There is an intriguing unknowingness about *The Age of Reason,* a literary naïveté that clings to every page and leads one to speculate that Sartre, far from having consciously chosen to use these methods, has, in his rejection of many of the older French writers, decided that he doesn't need to bother at all with aesthetic problems. This negation of the relevance of "art" is optimistic and, no doubt, wholesome and manly, but there's not enough sheer, raw, novelistic verve in this book to make its simplicity anything except annoying. One almost wishes Sartre were disingenuous enough to try to hide his deficiencies, he might even *pose* a bit, if posing may be considered the homage one pays to his betters by indicating, through these tricks and deceptions, that literature is a challenge which, if you can't meet it honestly, you try to outwit.

In technique *The Age of Reason* is particularly crude. The characters are neatly lined up and each goes through his first scene, then they trot back out and each has his second scene, and so on, until in the end they are all there, like soldiers, to get their final orders before marching off forever. Most of the characters have been snoozing in the bookshops for twenty years, but they aren't entirely dull; indeed they are like old acquaintances we would not go out of our way to meet again, but having unexpectedly run upon them we can take a certain interest in finding them unchanged. They are identified efficiently: the compulsive, self-destructive young girl, Ivich; the passive woman, Marcelle; the criminal disciple, Boris; the aging actress, Lola; the romantic Communist, Brunet; the homosexual, Daniel; and the hero, Mathieu. Of these characters the only one who acts convincingly is the homosexual, Daniel, and the only character whose conception is original is Mathieu. But unfortunately the hero is rather preposterous and hasn't enough personality to enliven any conception, existential or otherwise. Mathieu values his freedom more than anything else and it is suddenly threatened by the pregnancy of his mistress, Marcelle, whom he doesn't want to marry. In the end,

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after Mathieu has stolen the money for an abortion, Marcelle refuses his help and marries the homosexual, Daniel, who is willing for her to have another man's child. Mathieu's most significant act is the announcement that, even after he has been released from his obligation to Marcelle, he is no freer than before, still alone.

In speaking of the hero's temperament, Sartre says, "Various tried and proved rules of conduct had already discreetly offered him their services: disillusioned epicureanism, smiling tolerance, resignation, flat seriousness, stoicism—all the aids whereby a man may savor, minute by minute, like a connoisseur, the failure of a life." But Sartre has not really shown Mathieu in the act of living through the "proved rules of conduct" and so his rejection of them isn't very interesting. Mathieu starts out just as he ends, a peculiarly flat character divided into three distinct parts—indiscriminate sexual needs, Marcelle; romantic love, Ivich; personal needs unconnected with others, his love of freedom and desire to be himself. The fact that he ends just as he started is one of Sartre's points and, in finding this characterization meaningless, one does not thereby imply that human beings must through their experiences become fundamentally altered or any less relentlessly alone. The point is that we are alone *plus;* alone and unhappy, alone and maladjusted in a particular way, alone and full of contraries. For some reason Sartre will not look the psychological ambiguities and motivations in the eye.

Furthermore, the dramatic situation in which Sartre has cast Mathieu is not a fundamental moral issue of our time. For better or for worse it is understood, if not condoned, that a man *will* edge out of his responsibilities for pregnancy and so this crisis, in spite of its general dramatic content, lacks tragic, fateful inevitabilities for the hero. Mathieu is faced with a concrete dilemma which, as Sartre has treated it, tests man's practical, animal ingenuity far more than it illustrates the universal problem of man's freedom to act in accordance with his own knowledge of himself. In the hands of another writer this situation would be more than adequate for a novel, but Sartre lacks so much of the traditional novelistic equipment that we ask, as a substitute for characters, a significant parable of the human condition. *The Age of Reason* offers neither one man nor mankind.

Nothing could be further removed from Sartre and his notion that the writer cannot "sneak away" from his times than E. M. Forster's stories in *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment,* now issued in one volume by Knopf. Forster looks backward to Greece or, with the passionate intensity of the heroine of "The Eternal Moment," to twenty years before when a charming hotel had not been defiled by electric signs and modern conveniences.

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Of these shorter pieces of Forster's, most of them fantasies, one might ask with propriety the question that Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* amazingly asks himself about Joyce's *Ulysses*. "Does it come off?" he wants to know and then answers immediately, "No, not quite." I daresay Joyce has never been approached so simply and yet Forster, after his chilly beginning, warms up considerably and calls *Ulysses*, "a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud . . . a simplification of human character in the interests of Hell. . . . The Night Town scene does not come off except as a superfetation of fantasies, a monstrous coupling of reminiscences . . . the aim of which is to degrade all things and most particularly civilization and art, by turning them inside out and upside down."

In a sense these stories of Forster's do for Heaven what Forster imagined Joyce did for Hell, but this particular heaven is, in spite of the great variety of possibilities Forster finds there, monotonously literary. People are killed for being too academic about art ("The Celestial Omnibus") or doomed for praising the mediocre ("The Point of It").

As Lionel Trilling has pointed out, Forster stories are not very successful in themselves, but chiefly interesting in connection with the author's novels. Forster himself in a new preface compares them with the god, Hermes Psychopompus, who, "Lightly built, . . . can anyhow stand in the prow and watch the disintegrating sea, the twisted sky." And yet the themes used here are far from slight. On the one hand they deal with the meaning of art, the false use of it by schoolmasters and the indifferent public; on the other hand they are allegories about the challenge of life and the fact that man must heed the most daring and alive part of himself, the song of the siren and the athlete's jump. In "The Road to Colonus" the promise that life holds for the courageous is beautifully treated in a highly symbolical and complex way; and in "The Point of It" the notion that only those who take great risks can know the meaning of existence is deeply felt in the fate of a young boy, an invalid, who is aroused by the challenge of the sea, determined to express his true nature, and literally rows himself to death. It is puzzling that Forster didn't like Henry James any better than he did since James too was obsessed by the necessity to live, take the dare and greet the moment when it comes. But James's stories are strengthened and deepened by the hinted evidence of immense and violent passions, the beast in the jungle, for which Forster too often substitutes the faun in the curate's garden.

Forster's reputation has of course been built, not on these stories, but upon his five novels which, though outstanding and full of vitality, are also bewilderingly *minor* in a way difficult to evaluate. Perhaps the novels, with their expert construction and wonderful subtleties of characterization, only tell us why Forster is good and his other work, his

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stories and criticism, explains his secret, why he is not a giant, why, even when one admires him greatly, there is something baffling about his career. The tone of these stories is restrained and controlled, but ultimately, beneath the refined surface, one begins to notice Forster's curious haughtiness. He reminds one not of an arrogant youth, but of a dominating grandmother, safe in the assurance that her standards are purer than those of the ruffians around her. At times one feels Forster has failed to be as great as he might have been, not from the lack of energy or bravado, but from the crafty workings of an excessive and morbid pride which will not stoop to express itself in outright megalomania. Instead he uses a double-edged, unique, aristocratic modesty, actually meant to be triumphant, but which very strangely keeps this odd man at its mercy. These "tales" are good examples of his divided nature. They have imagination, wit and irony; they are the work of a deliberate artist, often brilliantly defiant in his fancifulness, but in the end somehow apologetic, as though Forster were too quick to tell us that the fashionable will reject him as, he says mockingly in one story, "suitable for reading in the train."

Most of the stories in J. F. Powers' new volume *Prince of Darkness* are concerned either with the Catholic clergy or the oppression of the Negro. The latter stories indicate a good ear for common speech and an ardent devotion to the Negro's cause, but they suffer a bit from the fact that this struggle has been extensively treated in our recent literature which, since these evils still exist, must show the powerlessness of literature as propaganda. Of course, in the long run, say in a hundred years, there is always the possibility that writers will achieve a real revolution in mass thinking about minorities; in the meantime, one suspects that the people who read their books, even the far more commercial ones than Mr. Powers', are just as devoted to freedom and decency as the writers themselves and are in no further need of conviction. Needless to say, the theme of oppression is entirely valid, but at the moment it is viciously oppressed by literary conventions and waiting for a revolutionary Negro or white man to set it free.

The Catholic stories are much better. They are witty and intelligent and have the added interest of recreating the daily life of the clergy, their feelings about their clothing, food, housekeepers, advancement, automobiles, airplanes, and even insurance. From the stories I gather that Mr. Powers is not a renegade Catholic but a Catholic reformer. "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does" is extremely well written, but the title story "Prince of Darkness" seems to me his most successful effort. It treats imaginatively the inner life of a priest who has no real calling, who is in fact like a businessman, bored and yet ambitious, crude though somewhat competent, jealous and still bitterly resigned. As

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Laurence Sterne said, "Human nature is the same in all the professions."

ELIZABETH HARDWICK

THE HAMMER AND THE QUILL

FORCES IN MODERN BRITISH LITERATURE 1885-1946. *By William York Tindall. Knopf.* $4.00.

IN THIS BOOK the wisecrack disguised as criticism comes into its own. Mr. Tindall seems to think that the neat answer serves to turn away thought (that horrible and disturbing phenomenon), but he does not realize that a smart or even witty remark, suitable for the pages of a periodical publication like *Time,* becomes a bore when embedded in a book; reviewing his work I read it through twice, and the humor was either flat or flatulent on the second reading.

Mr. Tindall has looked at everything, or nearly everything, but it does not seem to have done him much good. His book will doubtless become a textbook on the subject of what happened in English literature between his dates, a terrifying prospect. Even the living are filed away with a neat docket, and heaven help the writer who tries to move from his ordained position. The disapproving finger is upraised and the fatherly nodding of the head recalls the delinquent to his proper place in the class.

On the back of the dust-jacket Mr. Tindall's publishers have favored him with a selection, under the heading "Some Tindalliana from This Book." These consist of remarks on the same level as this one: "Although less contemptible than recently supposed and less bucolic, the Georgian poets are sometimes contemptible and commonly bucolic." While it is difficult to suppose that this sort of thing will excite anyone into buying the book, an examination of Mr. Tindall's phrasemaking is of interest, in the same way that a *sottisier* is interesting.

"Lawrence chose a gamekeeper for hero because gamekeepers are closer to nature in these civilized times than other Englishmen. Since they would not be gamekeepers if nature had not deprived them of intellect, they are suitable vehicles of the unconscious." Thinking of the gamekeepers (and the peasants and gypsies also cited) whom I have known, I have tried to understand what Mr. Tindall means; the only answer seems to be that anyone who does not play booksy games on Mr. Tindall's level has been deprived of intellect by a cruel nature. This is pernicious nonsense, derived from the character of the gamekeeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* Mr. Tindall has taken that character and has proceeded to generalize from him about all gamekeepers and, applying this back to his source, has served up the results as criticism.

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This form of flogging a book with a rod made from its own pages is common throughout the work.

Mr. Tindall knows that certain English writers have read, and have been influenced by, Franz Kafka: "If one is tempted, however, to compare Kafka and Warner to the latter's disadvantage, it may be recalled that the political situation confronting Kafka was not yet ominous enough to make him indifferent to the reader's claims." From this it might appear that Mr. Tindall *may* know something about Rex Warner, but that he certainly knows nothing about Kafka. Those unfinished, intensely personal books were not published during Kafka's life, and to suggest that they make any concessions to the reader is so patently wrong as to be unbelievable.

Some of the sayings in this book deserve to be preserved in aspic. "The best poet of the Auden generation is Auden." "The early and best verses of C. Day Lewis use the metaphysical manner of the seventeenth century and the erudite manner of Eliot to celebrate the individual and his troubles." The early verses of Day Lewis, (*Beechen Vigil,* 1925) employ the manner of Humbert Wolf, to whom they are dedicated. After attempting to climb over Hugh MacDiarmid and Sean O'Casey, we stumble upon this little rock of criticism: "With these loyal Celts to his left and the Labor Party to his right, moderate Laski surveyed the empty field." Fee fi fo fum, I hear the noise of Winston Churchill making an election address!

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Hardy "was a poet, but not enough of a poet to invent or discover an appropriate form for his individual feeling." Mr. Tindall states this baldly, but does not justify it by quotation. (Incidentally, the appearance and nonappearance of quotation in this 386-page book is really remarkable. When a quotation is applied to an author, it is rarely from one of his own works—oh, no, Mr. Eliot said this and Mr. Yeats said that about Hardy, who is not allowed to speak for himself.) Mr. Tindall does not mention the *Satires of Circumstance* or the other poems where Hardy describes English provincial life with an aptness and sureness which is not consistent with the lack of an appropriate form.

I could go on picking at random throughout the book, and at nearly every *sortis Tindalliana* I would find a foolishness which would equal or surpass those I have quoted, but there does not seem to be much point in doing so. This is a fat overgrown bedbug, parasitic upon the things of which it treats and unconcerned with the quality of the blood of the host upon which it gorges itself. It has nothing whatever to do with literature, and its only use will be to provide the earnest degree-seeking student with neat phrases with which to sum up modern British writing—wrongly.

RUTHVEN TODD

THE NOVEL AND THE WORLD'S DILEMMA. *By Edwin Berry Burgum. Oxford.* $3.75.

THE AMERICAN literary section of the NKVD has recently dressed itself in double-breasted pin-striped suits and come out into the genteel open again. We have, for instance, the new fancy quarterly, *Mainstream.* And we have Edwin Berry Burgum.

Who will read this book? I mean, *besides* the core of the faithful and those few strollers-in who find themselves in a bookstore and imagine they ought to read something sometime about the novel or the world. Well, I am afraid that there is a sizeable group of middlebrows—people not vitally interested in either modern literature or modern politics—who are determined to improve themselves by reading just this sort of book. And their effort will, as a matter of fact, pay them back in coin that they well know how to spend. For the chief result of reading *The Novel and the World's Dilemma* will be the strengthening of their conviction that the only thing worth reading, anyway, is *PM.* Because what Mr. Burgum does is to take fifteen great, near-great, and questionable writers and show how most of them didn't quite manage to end up on the side of democracy. Or, to put it straight, the book is a careful accounting of how the major novelists of the twentieth century and of the United States failed to join the CP.

(I would like to take time out at this point to compliment Mr. Burgum. He is the cleverest Stalinist I have ever read. He commits very few of the obvious crude blunders so typical of Stalinist "literary

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criticism." While considerably overrating Richard Wright, for instance, he is hip enough to criticize Max's speech at the end of *Native Son*. And he is firmly seated on the rickety bandwagon of psychoanalytic jargon. But, of course, he reveals himself only too clearly as a vicious fool in his horrendous piece on Kafka.)

The book is chock-full of "decadence" and "democracy." These blocks of cement continually turn up as substitutes for literary judgment. But in Mr. Burgum's case, I suppose it is just as well. However, old pieces of cement are not, in my opinion, the core of the book. The core of the book is that Mr. Burgum believes "that all functioning truth is ideationally platitude, and that what is important is that the platitude be true and functioning." Now if we clear away the debris, we are left with the statement that truth is platitude. Or, to complicate the matter, that truth is platitude when it has a relation to real life, that is, when it functions. To extend this revelation, for Mr. Burgum every statement that is not a platitude is either not true or does not function. If some of us are so nonprofessorial and non-Stalinist as to read Proust and Joyce for their *disproof* of the notion that truth is platitude, Mr. Burgum, we can assume, reads them to reconvince himself of it. With the horse facing him and running backwards, he has the assurance of having already arrived wherever he is going.

The theme of this book is the frustration of the ideal in bourgeois society; this, especially, should not be handled with mittens on. Unfortunately, that is just what Mr. Burgum has done—being, as he is, content with platitudes. But it is only with the failure of the Russian Revolution, and the consequent advent of fascism and war, that up-to-date despair begins. And here, of course, Mr. Burgum releases a loud and long "Include me out!" He prefers the zombie optimism of the Stalinist myth.

DAVID T. BAZELON

MELVILLE AND HIS MYTH

CALL ME ISHMAEL. *By Charles Olson, Reynal & Hitchcock*. $2.50.

ONE GETS the impression, in reading this remarkably interesting and remarkably baffling book, that it has somehow been put together in layers corresponding to different critical methods. The first part works by suggestion through the statement of fact; the second comes the nearest to the respectable academic methods of the study of influence and formal structure; while the last elicits a variety of symbols which, taken together, embody a kind of Melvillean historical myth.

The way *Call Me Ishmael* has grown may perhaps be suggested by the fact that the middle part was published as an essay in *Twice A Year* as long ago as 1938. It is still the core of the book, the most fully articulated in its argument, the most convincing. Olson's discovery of

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Melville's annotations in the edition of Shakespeare he read in 1849 pointed not merely to relatively direct correspondences in structure and language, but to Melville's imaginative fusion, with his own image of American democracy, of the revenge motive of *Hamlet,* the gloomy and magically ominous world of *Macbeth,* and above all the tragedy of madness, discovery and final purgation in *King Lear.*

By contrast the rest of the book seems not less interesting, but certainly more tentative. The first part (in which I include the Prologue) tells the terrible history of the wreck of the *Essex* with the consequent measured cannibalism; and it recites a series of facts and statistics that testify to the industrial importance of whaling to America in the first half of the nineteenth century. Taken together these suggest the ordered and directed brutality at the root of the world of *Moby-Dick;* and they relate it as microcosm to the America of the melting-pot, the violently marching frontiers (of which to Olson the Pacific is the last), the costly conquest of the productive resources of nature, with its enormous drive, its exploitation, and its human waste. Olson nowhere makes these implications explicit, nor does he clarify the ambivalence in the attitudes; perhaps he is right that it is unnecessary to empty them out with the exhaustions of demonstration.

The last sections of the book, whose more particular subject matter is Melville's later work and its decline in power, deal with symbols, and there is a bewildering variety of them. For Olson the chief appears to be space vs. time, and about each there is a hierarchy of attendants whose interrelation I but vaguely understand. The opposing symbols ramify in a number of directions: they begin as a comparative study of the earlier and the later Melville, they involve a psychology of the man himself, and they end as a kind of master clue to human history, if more particularly American history.

"In *Moby-Dick,*" Olson writes, "when Ishmael has said all he can about Ahab, he admits that the larger, darker, deeper part of the man is obscure." It is tempting to call Olson Ishmael. Yet I would add that I doubt whether he really wants to articulate the obscurity: I suspect that he values the vitality of mystery over the mortality of dissection. Olson's symbols, it seems to me, are finally at work on a myth whose embodiment is Melville, but whose function is not so much the explicating of Melville himself as the vitalizing of a way of grasping the experience of America, or even the world. Such large matters are likely to be cloudy, and they are unlikely to correspond exactly to their source. The mythical Melville is probably not the actual Melville. But the myth is clearly actively at work in Olson's imagination, transforming what it touches. A certain ambiguity and ambivalence in application and scope are probably the conditions of live myth.

ANDREWS WANNING

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Variety

James T. Farrell—The Critic Calcified

VIEWED STRICTLY as literary criticism, James T. Farrell's three volumes of essays* are of slight interest. His criticism usually reduces literature to an anterior political or sociological concept; seldom does it penetrate into the interior structure and relationships of a work of art. Yet Farrell's essays require analysis for at least three reasons.

1) The full-time novelist engaged in sustained critical effort is such a rarity in America that one wonders: why this exception?

2) Farrell defends the desirable values; he is an anti-Stalinist militant Marxist; he opposes academicism, moral absolutism, mysticism. He has courageously defended his opinions at a time when they are increasingly unpopular. Since Farrell has been one of the few well-known intellectuals to retain connections with the anti-Stalinist left, it is important to inquire if agreement with his social-political views *necessarily* involves agreement with his variety of literary criticism, or if one may separate the two and consider his criticism as uniquely derived from his literary situation.

3) Farrell's importance in American life is greater than his work warrants or his critics grant. Writers become *mythologized* into representatives of cultural configurations: Hemingway was thus adulated by an entire generation and today Farrell is becoming the center of a myth. He is the hero of provincial intellectuals who patiently accumulate manuscripts in trunks or attics, confident that they, *like Farrell,* will some day break through to fame. In him they see the triumph of persistence over cultivation, personal power over "mere" ability to write well, and American bluntness over cosmopolitan intellectualism. With a new depression there may well arise a group of social novelists who will acknowledge Farrell as their mentor.

Farrell's criticism, having always been a function of his creative work, may be read as an attempt to formulate, solve, or escape his problems as novelist. *A Note on Literary Criticism* codified his revulsion from Stalinist party-line criticism; virtually all of his subsequent formal critical strictures are of interest only in terms of that reaction. Much more illuminating are his individual essays.

The suspicion of literature and the sociological reduction. Though formally rejecting a tight identification of culture with ideology, Farrell is a very rigid critical taskmaster. *In practice* he cannot re-

**A Note on Literary Criticism; The League of Frightened Philistines;* and *Literature and Morality.*

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concile himself to the view that literature is a human activity requiring no moral or social sanction. His criticism is a constant quest for the certainty of external referents by which to place, justify or excommunicate a work of art. Somewhere in the cell of his critical consciousness, there is perhaps even a suspicion of literature itself. For as the Yvor Winters of the left, he must always search the work of art for a reflection of some other, more "serious" activity.

This search for moral sanction leads in practice to criticism as sociological reduction. All sociological theories are reductions; they must be: their purpose is to order a mass of facts into a simple sequence on which to base an hypothesis usable for prediction or control. That, I think, is done better by Marxism than by any other historical theory. But to say that much is not to see in Marxism a skeleton key to all the doors of existence; Marxism does not represent or explain all the conscious and subconscious aspects of human life which are the proper novelistic subject.

In Farrell's hands, however, the Marxist hypothesis becomes a static measure by which works of art are reduced to its necessarily simplified categories. His criticism makes rigid an approach to art which is valuable if its limits are acknowledged (it can illuminate the social setting rather than the specific nature or value of a work of art). Farrell's criticism thus becomes a persistent application of the genetic fallacy.

Open City. Where the work of art is itself simplistically political, Farrell's method works quite well; it digs up its implicit values. His review of the movie *Open City* contains shrewd observations on the hierarchization of personality and function in the Stalinist underground. But so eager is Farrell to squeeze the film's materials into neat categories that he ignores the complexity it does have. He distends the warm and natural Pina into a "new Communist woman"; and he even ignores sociological aspects of the film, such as its remarkable version of Catholicism's political role, when they don't fit into his schema. He has nothing to say on the most interesting aspects of the film: its pervasive sexual patterns; its version of Christian martyrology; its fascination with brutality; its images of flight (underground) contrasted to static shots (occupation); its aping of Hollywood's cheap melodramatic tricks; its vivid realization of Rome's slum life; and its conventional subordination of camera to dialogue. Farrell's critical rigidity prevents him from observing both the good and the bad; it allows him one shrewd insight which he strains into an imbalance of vision.

Prater Violet. When the artistic material is more complex, Farrell's method is even less adequate. His article on *Prater Violet* transforms its readily-perceived sociological theme into the book's entire meaning. Since his method cannot cope

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with them, he ignores the novel's two most fascinating aspects: its development of the oedipal relationship *through a relationship between artists* and its portrait of Bergman as archetype of the European creator. (While adhering to Freudianism, Farrell's criticism makes only the most transient and surface references to its concepts.)

Joyce. Farrell's criticism offers no illumination of the interior elements of a novel—style, technique, mythological reference. He views *Portrait of the Artist* as a portrait of the artist in relation to Irish nationalism; which is true but painfully paltry. The significance of the novel for the development of Joyce's style; its revelation of religious experience; its mythological parallelism, do not seem to interest Farrell.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. When he discusses the masterworks of literature, the inadequacy of Farrell's method is most evident. The Karamazov brothers are reduced to representatives of nineteenth-century Russia's political alternatives; the characters of *War and Peace* to functions of the "moral panorama of the Tsarist feudal nobility." Farrell's pieces on Tolstoy contain information on Russia, Napoleon, the bourgeois revolution, but they fail to answer, even to pose the essential critical problem: why is *War and Peace* a great novel?

Ambiguity rejected and literature denuded. Farrell's most recent essays harshly emphasize moralism as a critical principle. His attack on Lionel Trilling's story, *The Other Margaret* (PARTISAN REVIEW, Fall 1945) is an interesting case in point. Farrell begins with what seem to me quite valid general remarks on the retrogressive tendency among intellectuals to seek a haven in "individual morality"—the view that "the major moral problem facing man is the regeneration of the individual rather than the change of society." He counterposes "social morality" —the view that "major evils . . . are at least *decisively* influenced by . . . society" and that "social change [is] the major means of creating better moral conditions."

Farrell sees Trilling's story as a fictional version of the quest for "individual morality," and therefore denounces it as a "pretentious triviality" presenting a "reactionary moral view with insidious persuasiveness." Let us see. Trilling's story is a contrived dramatization of a family crisis in which Margaret Elwin, a 13-year-old crammed with progressive school liberalism, defends *the other* Margaret, a surly colored maid, from her parents' criticism. Her father agrees with Margaret that morality is socially conditioned but wonders about the wide diversity of behavior within that limitation. He seeks "the *double truth. As much as Margaret* he believed that 'society is responsible.' He believed the other truth too."

The quoted phrase should indicate that even in purely conceptual terms Farrell has not read Trilling too faithfully. But that is

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secondary; let us assume that Trilling does hold the views imputed to him by Farrell. In the context of this story, that does not matter. For the story is not a thesis or an argument; it is, however imperfectly executed, a work of art. It is therefore concerned with and dipped into *emotional ambiguity;* it pictures a situation of conflict between ideas about race, class, and morality and deeply-imbued folk attitudes. Had it been Trilling's purpose to advance a thesis on morality, he would have written an essay. His purpose was rather to dramatize a situation. Farrell refuses to recognize this simple fact when he denounces Trilling for "not [being] curious enough to ask himself what conditions in the lives of bus drivers and maids might contribute to rudeness. . . . " It seems likely that Trilling knows about the social conditions which contribute to rudeness; his story is an attempt to realize the fact that ideological awareness does not prevent one (even Farrell) from being irritated by rude bus drivers. But Farrell, high on his moral tower, will not countenance an admission of such contradictions; he thereby *denudes* literature. This rejection of ambiguity as a major substance of literature can lead only to a palsied view of art and eventually of morality.

Critical calcification and novelistic depreciation. Farrell's increasing difficulties as novelist are closely correlated with his increasing rigidity as critic. The depreciation of creative achievement from *Studs* to *Bernard Clare* is reflected in his harsh denunciations of writing which seeks its image of experience in a less naturalistic vision than Farrell's; his criticism becomes a defense of his creative work. In a review of Isaac Rosenfeld's *Passage from Home* (*New International,* April, 1947) Farrell attacks that novel on grounds which, if taken seriously, would dispose of a startling quantity of contemporary writing: it "presents as the hero, the observer rather than the actor"; its "conclusions do not carry the hero into the world to perform his acts of wisdom and courage in public struggle"; it is "escapist . . . into cultural narcissism." In these remarks the arteries of critical sensibility are hardened under the weight of self-justification; what is attacked is *not* Rosenfeld's novel but the entire novel of introspection. When one relates this excommunication with Farrell's weird overpraise for Calder Willingham's *End as a Man;* and when one adds Farrell's deprecation of Henry James for being "relatively pale" in his "moral protest" because he equates morals with manners (as if in the Jamesian novel manners are mere rules of etiquette rather than the most pervasive and fundamental manifestations of morality!)—then it is not difficult to discover the connection between novelistic depreciation and critical calcification.

Style as a burden. Why does Farrell write so badly? Why in his latest book such bloopers as "art . . . presents *imaginary images* of

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life"; or his continued need to reinforce his exposition with such flying buttresses as "to continue"; or the accumulation of declarative sentences with the rhythm of a well-tempered subway? I think Farrell's incapacity for simple prose must be seen in light of his critical methods. A critic who reduces the complexity and ambiguity of art to an ideological phantom, is not likely to respect the medium in which he works. He is not passionately convinced that a work of art is unique and irreducible; *that the paraphrase is never the same as the work itself.* Of what importance, then, are the mechanics of writing to one who consents to this fatal bifurcation of form from content?

I think there is a need today for social criticism; but it will have to be both social *and* criticism. That is, it will have to make the critical leap from sociology into the work of art itself. Such criticism, employing Marxism with subtlety and regard for its limitations, can help stem the rise of academicism in American literary life. But Farrell's criticism—which, I suspect, has its ancestry in the crude empiricism of early American social novelists and critics, like Norris and Parrington, rather than in Marxism—only creates a straw man of the left for the academicians to knock down. Which should not prevent us from recognizing that the approaches Farrell misuses are essential, if insufficient, to the practice of literary criticism. IRVING HOWE

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